

BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY



ROY ROCKWOOD



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BOMBA BROUGHT THE PADDLE DOWN WITH ALL
HIS FORCE.

"Bomba the Jungle Boy."

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BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY

OR

The Old Naturalist's Secret

BY

ROY ROCKWOOD

AUTHOR OF "BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY AT THE MOVING
MOUNTAIN," "LOST ON THE MOON," "THE CITY
BEYOND THE CLOUDS," ETC.

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By ROY ROCKWOOD

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BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY

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BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY

CHAPTER I

A NARROW ESCAPE

BOMBA came to a sudden halt in the densest part of the gigantic jungle.

A moment before he had been making his way with surprising suppleness and ease through the tangled brushwood, avoiding with equal dexterity the vines that trailed from the branches of the trees and the roots that reached out to trip him up. Now he stood as though turned to stone.

Far overhead the sun beat down fiercely from a brazen sky, though its rays were caught and held by the heavy foliage, so that beneath the branches of the trees semi-darkness prevailed. But if the brightness of the sun was thus excluded, its heat made itself felt, and masses of steaming vapor rose from the lush vegetation drenched by recent rains.

From a distance came the screams of parrots and the howling of monkeys, but otherwise the jungle was silent.

It had not been silent a moment before. From a point toward which Bomba was facing had come a sound that was new to the jungle and almost new to Bomba—a sound he had heard but twice. And each of those times was indelibly graven on his memory.

Once had been when Casson had brought down the savage jaguar with the iron stick or "rifle," as Casson had called it. The beast had been crouching on the limb of a tree beneath which Bomba had sat down to rest. He had not seen the creature, whose huge body had been flattened close against the bough.

He had had no intimation of danger until he had seen the startled look in the eyes of Casson and heard his shout of warning. Then he had leaped to his feet. At the same instant the jaguar sprang. But Casson drew the iron stick to his shoulder, and a flame leaped from the end of it, accompanied by a sharp report.

The beast whirled about in mid-air and fell to the ground, one of its outstretched claws grazing Bomba's leg as the latter sprang aside. The jaguar writhed and twisted about for a moment and then lay still.

When Bomba was sure the creature was dead, he had approached and examined it curiously. He had seen the natives kill game with arrows, and he half expected to see some missile pro-

truding from the body. But there was no sign of this—only a tiny hole through the center of its forehead, from which blood was oozing.

He had questioned Casson curiously, but the latter was in one of his silent moods that day and gave no explanation. But the convulsive way in which he had strained Bomba to his breast told how deeply he had been stirred by the narrow escape.

The other time and the last that Bomba had witnessed the work of the iron stick had been when a giant anaconda had reared its horrid head in front of Bomba and darted forward to enclose him in its folds. Again Casson had fired, but this time instead of a loud crack there had been a thunderous roar, and the stick had exploded into a thousand fragments. Casson had fallen over on his back. The great snake, frightened by the noise and struck by some of the flying bits of iron, had hastily retreated. Bomba, who had escaped with some scratches, had managed to get the unconscious Casson back to the hut in which they dwelt, and there the old man had lain for many days, nursed by Bomba and treated with some of the simple remedies he had learned from the natives.

Casson had finally recovered, but had never again been the same. His head had been injured by the explosion, and his memory, which had been

failing for some time, now almost wholly disappeared. At times he had flashes of recollection of his old life, but these were few and transient. Most of the time he was wrapped in moody silence, and Bomba felt more alone than ever.

But this had happened years ago, and the sound of the iron stick had almost passed from Bomba's memory. Now he heard it again, and his pulses leaped.

It came from a distance perhaps half a mile away. Who had fired the stick? He knew that none of the natives had any weapon of the kind. Could it be some man like Casson, a man with a white skin like Casson's and his own?

A white skin! Something tugged at Bomba's heart. He could not have told what it was. It might have been memory, intuition, instinct. But whatever it was, it took instant and entire possession of him.

He must find out who had fired the iron stick!

The primal law of the jungle is to mind one's own business. Intrusion on the affairs of another is never welcomed and usually resented. Bomba had learned to obey that law.

Ordinarily he would have given a wide berth to the locality from which the sound had come, swerved aside, and plunged deeper into the jungle. Where the iron stick sounded there was probably danger. It was associated in his mind with deadly

beasts and reptiles. There was trouble enough in the jungle without looking for it.

Why, then, did he depart from all his usual caution and begin making his way toward the spot from which the sound had come?

He did not know. A confused tumult of thoughts and longings swept through his brain. He was conscious of a desperate urge that impelled him in that direction; and that urge came from the profoundest depths of his soul.

A white man must have fired that iron stick. The stick itself had some appeal to his curiosity. He would like to see it again—that mysterious thing that killed like magic from a distance.

But that desire was not compelling. Had he thought a native had fired it, he would not have risked intruding on what might be a hostile hunting party, possibly some of the dreaded head-hunters that occasionally invaded this region.

No, it was the craving to see a man with a white skin like his own, like Casson's, that drew him on, drew him with a power he could no more resist than a chip could stem the current of Niagara.

To be sure, the white man might prove hostile. The deadly fire stick might be turned on himself. But he did not believe this. Casson had always been kind to him. All white men would be. Were they not his own kind? Was he not their brother? A wild surge of yearning swept over him.

All the longings he had felt so often, that came to him with increasing intensity day and night, that he had never been able to analyze and understand came to a head at the report of the iron stick. He could not resist them. He did not want to resist them.

He must see the man with the white skin!

Bomba was a striking figure as he worked his way through the jungle over sprawling roots and through a network of vines, gradually drawing closer to the spot from which the sound had come.

He was nothing more than a boy, fourteen years at most, of a little above the ordinary height at that age, compact and muscular. He had brown eyes and brown wavy hair and the whitest of teeth. His skin was darkly tanned by exposure to the sun.

On his feet were rude home-made sandals, and around his body was wrapped a bit of native cloth and a small puma-skin—the skin of Geluk, the puma, who had tried to eat the friendly parrots, Kiki and Woowoo. Bomba had caught him in the attempt and killed him with an arrow.

The skin heightened the resemblance of Bomba to a young panther as, light and supple, the muscles of arms and legs rippling under the bronzed skin, he threaded his way deftly through the underbrush.

Bomba lived with an old naturalist, Cody Cas-

son, in the depths of the Amazonian jungle, so remote from civilization that it was rarely if ever visited by white men. Of his past he knew nothing, and so far Casson had told him next to nothing. He had given the boy some rudiments of education, especially in his own line of botany and natural history, but even this teaching had ceased years before when the old naturalist's mind had been weakened by the exploding rifle.

Bomba knew nothing of the world at large, nothing of the white race to which he belonged, little even of the life of the natives of the region. For the pair did not mingle much with the latter and were themselves shunned by the superstitious natives, who had got the idea from the old naturalist's queer actions that he was a Man of Evil.

Two eyes of which he was not aware were watching Bomba as he approached a narrow part of the rude native trail he was following, wicked eyes, malignant eyes glowing with lurid fires.

The eyes were set in the swaying head of a cooanaradi, the most terrible serpent on earth.

It lay in its lair just beside the path that Bomba was following, its body, fourteen feet in length, thrown into coils, above which the slender head swayed back and forth. Evilily beautiful, it glowed with all the colors of the rainbow.

Had it been a rattlesnake or any other poisonous denizen of the jungle, it would have glided

away into the bushes, glad enough to avoid an encounter with human enemies unless attacked. Even the boa or the anaconda is apathetic and, except when moved by hunger, seldom takes the initiative.

But what makes the cooanaradi so dreaded, apart from its deadly poison, is its ferocity. It does not avoid attack; it seeks to make it. Nor is it satisfied when its enemy flees; it follows in pursuit.

But there was no need yet for that. All unsuspecting, its prey was coming toward it. Soon he would be in reach of the lightning stroke. The evil eyes gloated in anticipation.

Then, when Bomba was barely ten feet away, he saw it!

There was no time to string his arrow. There was no time to draw his machete. Even while he looked, the snake launched its spring.

Like a flash Bomba turned and ran for his life!

CHAPTER II

THE MEN WITH THE IRON STICK

AT the moment that Bomba made his first startled leap he heard close behind him the thud of a body as it struck the earth. The reptile had missed its spring.

But this brought Bomba small comfort. He knew that the fight had just begun, that behind him death was coming and traveling fast.

One look was all he cast behind him, but that was sufficient to show the slithering long body of his implacable foe moving swiftly along the trail.

Bomba was agile and fleet of foot, and he tore along at an astounding rate of speed. But he knew too much of his adversary to believe that he could distance it. In the long run, the endurance of the snake would outlast that of the fugitive.

But if Bomba's feet were fast, so was his brain, and it was working now with lightning rapidity. It was recalling every turn and oddity of the trail along which he was speeding.

There were plenty of trees, but before he could get a grip and begin to climb, the fearful thing

Go o o

would be upon him. And even if he had sufficient start to avoid the first stroke, the snake could climb much more rapidly than Bomba could dream of doing.

Had there been a stream at hand, he would have plunged into it, although he might have become the prey of some lurking cayman or been torn to bits by the fierce piranhas. Either of those fates would have been a possibility. But he would at least have had a chance of not being attacked, while, unless he could escape from the cooanaradi, death was a certainty.

At times, when he came to a little opening, he would dart off to the right or the left, so as to disconcert the enemy. This had the desired effect more than once, and enabled him to get some space ahead before the snake was again at full speed on his trail.

Bomba's breath was fast failing him, but his courage and mental alertness still remained. Then he caught sight of something that gave him a gleam of hope.

It was a thick, matted mass of whiplike streamers hanging from one of the trees. It spread out like a huge fan with narrow interstices between the tough withes. Behind this screen he darted like a flash and stood there panting, facing the enemy.

The cooanaradi was not twenty feet away,

coming at tremendous speed, its eyes red with fury. As it approached, Bomba thrust his face against the screen and shouted.

What he had hoped came to pass. The snake, infuriated at the challenge, reared and struck at the face of his foe. Bomba dodged, and the opened jaws of the snake caught and in turn were held by the matted mass into which the fangs had sunk.

It writhed wildly and tried to extricate itself. But in an instant Bomba had leaped to the other side of the screen. His hands worked like lightning, deftly winding the withes like cords around the twisting body, until it was securely enmeshed in a net from which there was no escape.

Only when he had made sure of his victory did Bomba desist and stand panting a little distance off, watching the unavailing efforts of the captive to free itself.

Craft and cunning had triumphed over the fiend of the jungle. The boy had had a narrow escape from one of the most terrible of deaths, and he owed it solely to his own speedy feet and active brain.

He was drenched with perspiration from head to foot. His lungs were strained almost to bursting. His breath came in great gasping sobs. But he had won, and every nerve tingled with exultation.

His hand slid to the handle of his machete, a formidable double-edged knife ground to almost a razor's sharpness and fully a foot in length.

But after a moment's reflection he slipped the partly drawn weapon back in his belt. A slash at the snake might sever some of the withes with which it was bound, only wound the reptile and permit it to get free.

No, the jungle itself could be trusted to finish the work begun by the boy. The peccaries, or wild pigs, would happen along, and to them a snake was the daintiest of foods.

Or there were the vultures. Bomba cast his eyes upward through an opening in the trees and saw one of these rapacious creatures circling about and slowly descending, already attracted by that almost miraculous instinct that tells the carrion eaters where death has come or is imminent.

And even the vulture would have to come soon, or a swarm of ants would be going over the reptile stripping the flesh from the bones.

In the excitement of the flight and pursuit, Bomba had forgotten for the moment the object of his quest. Now it came back to him with the force of a shock.

The white man with the iron stick! Could he find him now? Or was he too late?

He cast one glance at his captive to make sure that it was securely held. Then having satisfied

himself on this point, hurriedly resumed his journey.

But he did not follow the same path on which he had found the cooanaradi. He knew that these reptiles usually traveled in pairs, and he had no desire to encounter the mate of the one that had so nearly proved his doom.

So he made a wide detour, although he bitterly resented the necessity of doing so, for now a fear that was almost panic assailed him that he might miss meeting the man with the iron stick. It was already late in the afternoon, and unless he came upon him before darkness set in, he would probably fail altogether in finding him. And this possibility had by this time assumed the proportions of a calamity.

Why he should lay such stress on this was more than Bomba could explain, even to himself. But the fact was there. He must find this man!

There was no trail in the direction he had been forced to choose, and often he had to hack his way through the underbrush with his machete. It was laborious and exhausting work, and it was nearly an hour before he caught a scent of roasting meat that told him he was in the vicinity of some human inhabitant of the wilds.

Now he worked with extreme caution, for he was by no means sure of his reception, and he wanted, from the safe seclusion of the jungle, to

form his own ideas of conditions before venturing into the open.

A few minutes more of stealthy approach, and he heard the sound of voices. Some of these he recognized at once as those of natives.

But there were other tongues too, and with a thrill he realized that they were speaking the same language that he and Casson used and that he had never yet heard from other lips! Some of the words he could not understand, but the simpler ones were familiar.

He tingled with delight. He was not then too late. The white man was there. He could look upon him, devour him with his avid eyes, perhaps speak with him!

A moment later he reached the fringe of the heavier jungle. Beyond, it widened out into a glade of considerable extent.

He dropped on his knees and wormed his way to a great tree near the edge. Then, lying flat on the ground, he carefully parted the underbrush and peered through.

He saw at once that he had come upon a considerable party. A rude tent had been pitched in the center of the glade, a number of packs littered the ground, and a dozen natives were engaged at various tasks. A fire had been built, and some freshly cut steaks of meat, stuck on spits, were being roasted by native cooks.

Bomba gave these but a cursory glance. His eyes were riveted on two men, one tall and gaunt, the other stocky and muscular, who sat on adjoining stumps conversing with each other. One was cleaning and oiling an iron stick. The other was skinning the body of an animal the size of a calf that Bomba recognized from its coarse hair and blackish brown hide as that of a tapir, whose life had evidently been taken by the shot that Bomba had heard.

The faces of the men were bronzed, but their shirts were open at the throat, and Bomba could see the white skin like his own and Casson's.

Again that strange thrill shot through him and he had all he could do to repress a shout of delight.

He scanned their faces closely. They were keen faces, alight with intelligence. How different, Bomba thought, from the vacuous faces of the natives who surrounded them. To him they seemed like visitants from another sphere.

And they were kindly faces. The men were laughing and joking with each other, evidently in the best of spirits. There was nothing there that need arouse fear in any but evil-doers. His heart warmed with a sense of kinship.

Impulsively he rose to go out into the clearing. Then he sank down again. Shyness, reticence,

caution, the restraint bred of the jungle! He longed to show himself, yet he shrank back.

His problem was solved for him. His sudden movement had caught the keen eye of a native. Instantly the fellow shrilled an alarm.

The white men snatched their iron sticks and sprang to their feet.

The die was cast! Bomba leaped out into the open!

CHAPTER III

A STEALTHY FOE

AN exclamation of surprise came from the white men as Bomba advanced toward them with his upraised palms, extended as a sign of amity, and they lowered their rifles.

"Just an Indian kid!" remarked the stockier of the two with a laugh.

"Indian nothing!" retorted the other, as his keen eyes swept the lad. "Look at his hair, his eyes, his features. He's as white as we are, or my name isn't Gillis. Look again, Dorn."

"Guess you're right, old man," conceded Jake Dorn, after a close scrutiny. "But what in the mischief is he doing here? I didn't know there were any other whites within a thousand miles of us."

"Neither did I," replied Ralph Gillis. "But we were evidently wrong. Probably he belongs to some other camp of rubber hunters not far away."

"But look at his clothes, if you can call them clothes," said Dorn, with a puzzled air. "I never saw a white boy dressed like that. Nothing but a clout and a puma skin."

"We'll soon solve the mystery," said Gillis.
"Come here, boy," he added kindly.

Bomba came shyly toward him.

"What is your name?" asked Gillis.

"Bomba," was the reply.

"Bomba!" repeated Gillis, with a frown of perplexity. "That's a queer name for a white boy. For you are white, aren't you?"

"Yes," replied Bomba proudly, as he drew aside the puma skin and exhibited his chest.

"And since you understand what I say to you, you must be either American or English," pursued Gillis. "What is your other name?"

"I haven't any," was the reply. "I am Bomba."

The men exchanged puzzled glances.

"Who are your folks?" put in Dorn.

Bomba pondered for a moment.

"I don't know what that word means," he replied simply.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Gillis. "I mean your father, your mother."

"I guess I never had any," replied Bomba. "I never saw them or heard of them."

"The poor kid!" murmured Dorn.

"But you must have somebody to live with or take care of you," said Gillis.

"Yes," replied Bomba, "I live with Cody Casson."

"Who is he and where is he?" asked Gillis.

"He is an old man," answered Bomba. "He lives in a hut a long way off," and he pointed toward the south.

"Is he a relation of yours?" asked Dorn.

"I don't know what that means," was the answer.

Gillis threw up his hands in despair.

"Well, wouldn't that get your goat?" he ejaculated.

"I haven't got any goat," replied Bomba, who thought the question was addressed to him.

The men laughed heartily, and Bomba, though a little puzzled, laughed with them. He was glad that he had said something that pleased them. They were nice men. His heart warmed to them.

Gillis returned to the attack.

"When did you come into this jungle?" he asked.

"I have always been here," answered Bomba.

"But don't you remember ever living anywhere else?" persisted Gillis. "Don't you remember coming over the ocean?"

"What is the ocean?" asked Bomba.

"It is like a river, but a thousand times as big," explained his questioner.

Bomba shook his head.

"No," he said. "I never saw any water I could not swim across."

"Haven't you ever heard of England or America?" put in Dorn.

"No," was the reply. "There are no animals here that have those names."

A glance of pity passed between the two men.

"An untutored child of nature, if there ever was one!" exclaimed Gillis. "How in heaven's name do you explain it?"

"Search me!" replied Dorn. "Seems to me the only thing to do is to hunt up this fellow Casson and get it out of him. The boy ought to be taken out to civilization and have his chance."

"He ought," assented Gillis. "Though I don't see how we can do anything just now, for our road lies in the opposite direction and we're behind our schedule now. We've *got* to get to the coast in time to get that steamer. But later on we'll take the matter up ourselves or have some of the authorities look into it. But those steaks are done now, and I'm as hungry as a wolf. This young visitor of ours shall fill up too, if he cares to stop and eat with us."

Bomba gladly accepted the invitation, not only because he was hungry but because it gave him a chance to stay in the company of the white men. He would have liked to stay with them forever. The thought of parting filled him with dread.

They brought knives and forks from their kit and offered one of each to Bomba. But he did not

know their use, had never seen them, and ate his meat by plucking it apart with his teeth and fingers, as was his custom, the while he watched with wonder the deft way in which the table utensils were used by his new acquaintances.

He felt that it must be a better way than his. The white men did it, and he himself was white and ought to do it too. Before he was half way through the meal, he shyly reached out for the knife and fork and tried to imitate them. The effort was not very successful, but they sensed his feeling, and be it said to their credit they did not laugh.

The meal was interspersed with questionings, in the course of which the men learned much and gained marked respect for Bomba's courage and self-reliance. They were aghast at his story of the way he had trapped the cooanaradi, and would not have believed it had not the simple way that Bomba told it carried conviction. He did not boast, merely narrated the incident as though it were not of any particular importance and simply a part of the day's work in the jungle.

"Why not take the boy along with us, if he's willing?" suggested Gillis, thoughtfully, to his companion. "It would bring him out to civilization, and at the same time he'd be a mighty valuable addition to our party. We'd be killing two birds with one stone."

"Right enough," agreed Dorn. "How would you like to go along with us?" he asked, addressing himself to Bomba.

The boy's heart leaped and delight shone in his eyes. Oh, how he wanted to go! But the next moment the light faded and his heart sank.

"I could not leave Casson," he said. "He would die if I left him alone."

"The boy's true blue," said Gillis, "and we mustn't tempt him. But soon or late we'll see this Casson and perhaps get them both out of the jungle. The whole thing is the queerest affair I ever came across."

He struck a match to light his pipe, and Bomba jumped at the sudden spurt of flame.

"Never see one of those before?" asked Dorn, in surprise.

"No," replied Bomba. "I make fire like this."

He took a stick and a tiny wooden bowl from his belt, twirled the stick dexterously, and in a few moments produced a spark.

"Well done!" cried Dorn admiringly.

Bomba was pleased at the note of approbation, but in his heart he knew that the white men's way was quicker and better. He looked longingly at the matches, and Gillis, with a smile, handed him a box of them, which Bomba grasped eagerly and thrust into the small pouch at his belt. Now he

could make fire as the white men did. He felt that he was growing closer to them.

Gillis showed him his rifle. It was a far finer iron stick than Casson's had been, and Bomba examined it with the greatest curiosity.

He did not in the least understand the principle of it, but he knew its power. The dead tapir was evidence of it, as well as his memory of the way a similiar stick had slain the jaguar.

"I'll show you how it works," volunteered Gillis, noting the boy's eager interest in the weapon.

Bomba nodded delightedly. This was what he had been wishing for ever since he had reached the camp, but had been too shy to ask of his own accord.

Ralph Gillis took a card and tacked it up against a tree about fifty feet away, Bomba watching him intently.

Then Gillis took up his position and raised the rifle to his shoulder. Bomba, with a lively recollection of what had happened when Casson had fired at the anaconda, edged some distance away.

There was a sharp crack, and Bomba's keen eyes noticed a slight quivering of the card.

"Come along," said Gillis, beckoning to the boy, and Bomba followed him to the tree, where he saw a small hole in the card that had not been

there before. But he looked in vain for any sign of scorching.

"Why didn't the fire burn it?" he asked.

Gillis looked at him perplexedly, and then laughed as he grasped his meaning.

"Bless you," he said, "it wasn't the fire you saw coming from the muzzle that struck the card. It was a cartridge just like this," and he drew one of the pellets from his belt.

Bomba examined it curiously.

"Why didn't I see this when you fired the iron stick?" he asked.

"It went too fast for you to see," explained Gillis patiently.

"You could see my arrow if I shot it," said Bomba.

"That's different," said Gillis. "The arrow is bigger, and it doesn't go as fast. And it doesn't go as straight, either."

"It goes straight," declared Bomba.

"Do you mean to say that you could hit that card?" asked Dorn incredulously.

"Yes," said Bomba.

"I'm from Missouri," remarked Gillis.

"Where is that?" asked Bomba.

The men laughed.

"Never mind," said Gillis. "Let's see you hit the card."

Bomba drew an arrow from his belt, fitted it to

the string, and, scarcely appearing to take aim, let it go.

A cry of surprise broke from his new acquaintances as they saw the arrow standing out straight from the center of the card.

"The boy's a wonder!" cried Gillis.

"Robin Hood had nothing on him!" declared Dorn.

"Who was he?" asked Bomba. "And why did he have nothing on him?" as he glanced at the well-clothed forms of the white men.

"I can see that we'll have to cut out slang," laughed Dorn. "Robin Hood was a great shot with the bow and arrow, and what I meant to say was that you could shoot as straight as he could."

Bomba's heart swelled with pride at the approbation of the white men. It seemed to him the sweetest music he had ever heard.

Dusk was drawing on now, and the forest began to waken. From the lairs in which they had lain during the heat of the day wild beasts rose, yawned, stretched themselves, and then stalked out on their nocturnal search for prey. Death was abroad.

Two or three times, as Bomba sat by the tent of his new-made friends, he raised his head and sniffed the air.

"What is it?" asked Gillis curiously, after the third repetition.

"Jaguars," answered Bomba.

The men grasped their rifles and peered into the darkening forest surrounding them.

"I don't see any," remarked Gillis, after a moment.

"They see you," replied Bomba.

The calm matter-of-fact statement sent a little chill down their spines.

"How do you know there are any about?" asked Dorn.

"I smell them," was the reply.

"On what side of the camp are they?" queried Gillis.

"All sides," said Bomba.

CHAPTER IV

HOW BOMBA SAVED THE CAMP

THE men sprang to their feet at this ominous declaration and their eyes swept the forest in every direction.

"And the boy speaks of this as calmly as though it meant nothing to him or us!" exclaimed Jake Dorn.

"I wonder if he really knows what he is talking about," cried Gillis. "Tell me," he demanded turning to Bomba, "what makes you think there are jaguars all about us?"

"I smell them and I hear them," returned Bomba. "First I heard them a long way off. They were screaming. Then they came nearer, and they were snarling. Now they are nearer still, and they are purring. I hear them."

"More than I do, then," said Gillis, after a few moments, when he and his comrade had listened with all their ears. "But I've heard some wonderful stories of the smell and hearing of those who have lived long in the jungle, and perhaps the boy is right. If he is, we've got a fight on our hands

all right. When is this little shindig going to take place?" he asked Bomba grimly, as his hand tightened on the stock of his rifle.

"I do not know shindig," answered Bomba.

"When will the jaguars try to kill us?" asked Dorn.

"Not for a long while," replied Bomba. "Not till it gets very dark and many more come."

"That's cheerful," muttered Gillis.

"They smell the blood of the tapir," Bomba went on. "Then they come and see many men here. Much meat for the jaguars."

"We'll leave out those pleasant little details," said Dorn, repressing a shudder. "It seems likely that we're in for the fight of our lives, and you and I will have to do the most of the fighting, Gillis. These natives aren't good for anything."

"I will help," said Bomba.

"By ginger, I believe the boy will!" exclaimed Gillis. "He's as plucky as a wildcat. Though I'm afraid that bow and arrow won't do much against such beasts."

"I have my machete," Bomba reminded them, half drawing the gleaming weapon from its leather sheath.

"I'm blest if the little rascal isn't thinking of fighting them hand to hand!" ejaculated Gillis in admiration.

"I do not want to, but I will if I have to," said

Bomba. "It is better to kill than be killed. But wait, I think of something."

While he had been talking, his eyes had been roving among the trees that edged the clearing, and they lighted as they fell on a tree with triangular pointed leaves.

He pointed to a pail that was lying near one of the packs.

"Let me have that," he said, pointing to it.

"What do you want of it?" asked Dorn.

"Don't bother with questions," suggested Gillis. "The boy has something in mind, and after what I've seen of him I'm willing to give him a free hand. Here it is," handing the pail to him.

"Now," said Bomba, "make the fire big. The jaguars will go back from the light. I have to go into the woods. I do not want them so near."

"Gillis gave a few sharp orders to the natives and they heaped brush on the fire, which had been allowed to die down, and soon it was crackling fiercely, sending a broader zone of light through the surrounding forest.

This made the immediate proximity safe for the time, and Bomba took the pail and started out for the tree he had discerned.

"Wouldn't one or both of us better go with you?" asked Dorn anxiously. "It isn't right to let you go in there alone."

"No," said Bomba. "I must do my work my

self. You can keep the iron sticks ready. But you will not need them yet."

He took the pail and went unhesitatingly into the woods. The heavy underbrush closed behind him and swallowed him up, though the lurid glare of the fire gave those in the camp occasional glimpses of his progress.

Bomba made his way toward the tree he sought, and, reaching it, set down the pail and drew his machete.

He drove the knife through the bark and into the body of the tree as far as his strength permitted. Then he drew the knife down in a long vertical slash.

He pulled the blade out, lifted the pail, held it under the cut and waited.

In a few moments a sticky sap began to exude from the tree, at first slowly, and then more rapidly. Soon it was trickling in a thin stream into the pail.

It was eerie work waiting there, where he knew that greenish-yellow eyes were watching him from the jungle, only deterred for the moment from coming nearer by the light that came from the fire. But Bomba had learned patience in the hard school of the jungle, and he stood like a statue, the pail in one hand, his machete in the other ready for instant use, until the receptacle was nearly full.

Then he took it and, tilting it slightly so that a thin but steady stream fell on the leaves that carpeted the jungle, he made the circuit of the camp.

The white rubber hunters caught sight of him at intervals during his course, and watched his progress with bated breath.

"What on earth do you suppose the boy is doing?" asked Dorn.

"Looks as though he were weaving some magic charm out there," muttered Gillis. "Something perhaps that he has learned from the witch doctors of the region. It's making me creepy! It's uncanny!"

The men were immensely relieved when Bomba at last emerged from the shadows, put down his empty pail, and seated himself on a stump near them.

"What have you been doing?" asked Gillis.

Bomba picked up the pail.

"Feel," he said, pointing to the interior.

Gillis put his finger on the bottom of the pail, and when he withdrew it, it was covered with a pale, yellow, sticky substance. It felt uncomfortable, and he tried to rub it off with a bit of cloth. But this he found was almost impossible.

"Sticks closer than a brother," he muttered. "What is it and where did you get it?"

"From the tree," replied Bomba. "I stuck my

knife in the tree and hurt it. The tree wept. These are the tears of the tree."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dorn, "the boy's a poet."

"Right enough," agreed Gillis. "What he means, of course, is that he tapped the tree and got this gum-like sap from it. But why did you do it and what have you done with most of the sap?" he asked, addressing himself to Bomba.

"I spilled it on the leaves all around the camp," said Bomba. "It is good for us and bad for the jaguars."

The men looked at each other in perplexity.

"Can you make out what he's getting at?" asked Dorn of his companion.

"Not in the least," replied Gillis. "It's all Greek to me. How is it bad for the jaguars?" he asked Bomba.

"The jaguars step on it," explained Bomba. "The leaves stick to their feet. They try to shake them off. But the leaves stick. Then they try to rub them off with their heads. The leaves stick to their heads. The gum gets in their eyes. It is bitter. It makes them blind. They get frightened. They cannot see where they are going. They forget all about the white man and the meat. They cry. They run. That is all."

The men looked at each other, struck dumb with amazement.

"That is all!" exclaimed Gillis, when he had

recovered his breath. "By ginger, it's enough!"

"I should say it was," agreed Dorn. "Boy, I take off my hat to you."

As he was bareheaded at the moment, Bomba was a little puzzled at this, but he sensed the warm approval of the white men, and his heart rejoiced. He, too, was white, and he had made his brothers happy.

He thought it well, however, to add a word of warning.

"You must keep the iron sticks ready," he said. "Most of the jaguars will be stopped by the gum. But some of them, maybe one, two, three, will miss the leaves that stick and they will get into the camp."

"We can probably handle them," said Gillis. "At any rate we'll do our best. I only wish we had more brushwood to keep the fire going strong. But we hadn't counted on this wholesale raid, and now it would be as much as one's life was worth to go into the forest for more. We'll have to worry along as best we can."

Having to husband their resources, they could only maintain a moderate fire, and as the hours wore on they had to be still more economical in feeding it.

As the zone of light narrowed they knew that their enemies were creeping closer, waiting only for the most opportune moment of attack.

They had put the camp into the best position for defense that circumstances permitted. The natives had been warned of the danger and had spears and arrows ready, though the white men knew that they would be far more ready to run than fight when the pinch came.

Toward midnight a sudden spitting and snarling rose on one side of the camp, to be taken up shortly on the other. There came the sound of heavy bodies rolling about in the underbrush and crashing through thickets. All the natural caution of the cat tribe seemed to have been abandoned in a rush of panic terror. The snarls and roars swelled into a hideous din that made the natives quake with fear, but that the white men understood.

Bomba's spell was working!

But though they exulted, they did not abate one jot of their vigilance.

It was fortunate for them that they did not, for a few minutes later a huge, tawny body came hurtling through the air, landed within twenty feet of Gillis, and crouched for a second spring.

Two rifles spoke simultaneously with the twang of Bomba's bow. The jaguar quivered, rolled over on its side, and lay still.

While their eyes were still fastened on it there came a roar from another direction, and a second jaguar landed behind Gillis and Dorn. They

turned and fired, but so hurriedly that they either missed or only slightly wounded the animal. Before they could fire again it would be upon them! They dodged and clubbed their rifles, horror-stricken, awaiting the attack.

Like a flash Bomba drew his machete.

The beast launched itself in the air.

CHAPTER V

BEATEN OFF

THROUGH the air whizzed a gleaming, long, razor-edged knife that buried itself in the jaguar's throat!

The stricken jaguar landed on the spot where but a moment before, Gillis and Dorn had stood, and sprawled out in a heap. It made one or two frantic digs at its throat in the attempt to dislodge the machete. But it had gone deep and the beast's efforts were unavailing. A few convulsive struggles, and it was dead.

Amazed at this sudden end of their foe, the men approached it cautiously and prodded it with the butts of their guns. But there was no movement. The knife had done its work effectively.

Dorn's eyes caught sight of the handle of the weapon, and he stooped down and drew it out, though he had to tug hard to get it. He held it up before his astonished companion.

"How did this get there?" asked Gillis.

"It is mine," said Bomba, coming up and reaching out his hand to reclaim it.

"Yours?" demanded Dorn. "Why, you weren't near enough to stab the beast!"

"I threw it," said Bomba, wiping the knife on the grass and slipping it back into his belt.

"G—great Scott!" stuttered Dorn. "He—he threw it!"

"And threw it as straight as he shot the arrow!" ejaculated Gillis. "And with so much force that you had all that you could do to draw it out. Boy, you're a wonder! You saved the life of one or both of us!"

"I was glad to help you," said Bomba, showing all his white teeth in a happy smile. "But now we must put the jaguars near the edge of the woods where the others will see them."

"What's the idea?" queried Gillis. "So that they can't feast on them and not be so hungry after us?"

"No," said Bomba. "The others will not eat them. They fight and kill each other when they are angry, but they do not eat one another. But when the live ones see these dead ones, they will know that this place is not good for jaguars, and they will go away."

"Sounds reasonable," said Gillis. "But whether the plan works or not, what this boy says goes. I'm frank to confess that he's got me buffaloed. If he hadn't been here to-night, you and I would have been dead men, Dorn."

"He's saved the camp all right," assented Dorn, as he directed some of the natives to drag the heavy bodies to the places that Bomba indicated.

That the sight of their dead kindred daunted whatever other jaguars might have intended to make an onslaught on the camp, seemed clear as time went on. The jungle was vocal, as it always is at night, with the strident notes of insects, the howling of monkeys, and now and then the distant bellow of an anaconda.

But the jaguars seemed to have taken themselves off. Bomba's keen ears could no longer detect the subdued growling and purring of the four-footed raiders, the soft thud of their padding feet. Nor were his nostrils conscious of their presence.

After a full hour had passed, he relaxed his tense attitude, stretched, and yawned.

"They have gone," he announced.

"Are you sure?" asked Gillis, eagerly.

"They have gone," repeated Bomba. "And they will tell the others. They will not come back. I will sleep."

"Go to it, my boy," said Dorn. "You've earned it, if ever anyone did. I don't know what we'd have done without you."

"Our name would have been Dennis," declared Gillis.

"I thought your name was Gillis," said Bomba wonderingly.

"It is," was the laughing reply. "I keep forgetting that you don't know our slang. I mean our name would have been mud—there I go again. What I mean to say is that we would have been killed if you had not been here."

Bomba made up his mind that he would remember these new words so that he could talk like the white men. He already had a precious collection, "goat," "mud," "Dennis," "shindig." And there had been others, too, that he would try to recall. He would tell them to Casson and show him how much he had learned. But just now he was very sleepy.

"I'll get you some blankets to lie on," said Gillis.

"No," said Bomba, "I will sleep this way."

He threw himself down on the ground near the fire, and in a moment was fast asleep.

But there was no sleep just then for Gillis or Dorn. They were too wrought up by the dreadful experiences through which they had gone to close their eyes. So they sat with their rifles on their knees until the first faint tinge of dawn showed in the east. Then they knew that the danger was past, for that night at least, and after summoning a couple of natives and placing them

on watch, they threw themselves wearily on their blankets in a sleep of utter exhaustion.

Bomba was the first to awake, and for a moment found it hard to realize where he was. He sat up, looked around, and caught sight of the bodies of the jaguars. Then all the events of the stirring night came back to him.

He had borne himself well in circumstances that might have made grown men quail. He had met death face to face, and it had been a matter of touch and go whether he would escape unscathed. But the fortune that favors the brave had been with him, and he had not a scratch. He had trapped the cooanaradi. He had slain one jaguar and foiled the others. It was natural that he should be filled with a feeling of exultation.

But far above the satisfaction at his own safety was that which came from the thought that he had saved the white men. Without him, they would surely have been doomed! He had established his right to be regarded as a brother. He had vindicated his white skin.

In twenty-four hours he had gone far. A new world had opened before him. He had crossed a chasm that separated him from his own race. He had realized some of the dreams, answered some of the questions, solved some of the mysteries that for a long time past had been tormenting him.

But he realized that he still had far to go. How much these white men knew! In what a different world they moved! How far superior they seemed to him! How ignorant he was, compared to them!

But he would learn. He would ask Casson. Casson must know all the things the other white men knew. And then his heart sank, as he realized that Casson seemed to have forgotten all or almost all that he had ever known. There was little help to be expected from the man with whom Bomba lived.

He was engrossed in these meditations when Gillis opened his eyes. They fell on Bomba, and recollection came into them.

"How does our hero feel this morning?" asked Gillis, with a genial smile.

"What is a hero?" asked Bomba, with his usual directness.

"Why, you fill the bill as well as anyone I ever saw," returned Gillis. "A hero is a man or boy who isn't afraid."

"But I was afraid last night," said Bomba.

"I guess we all were," remarked Gillis. "Well then, a hero is one who, even if he is afraid, doesn't let fear get the best of him, but fights on and makes up his mind to keep on fighting till he dies. And that's what you'd have done last

night if it had come to that. But it's getting pretty late, and we'll have to get a move on."

He shook Dorn awake, gave some orders to the natives, and soon the camp was alive with preparations for breakfast.

This time Bomba took his knife and fork at the outset, and was gratified to note that he could already handle them much better than he had on the night before.

"Well, now, my boy," said Gillis, after they had enjoyed a hearty meal, "we'll have to be packing and getting on our way. As we told you last night, we'd like nothing better than to have you go along with us. Still think you can't, eh?"

"I should like to go," replied Bomba, and the look in his eyes was much more eloquent than words. "But Casson is old and sick. He has been good to me. I have to get his food for him. He would die if I should go."

"That settles it then, of course," said Gillis regretfully. "But don't you think, my boy, that we're going to forget you. We owe you too much for that. Either we'll come back, or we'll send someone else to get you and Casson out of this jungle and bring you where you belong. In the meantime, we want to do something to show you how grateful we are. You saved our lives, and we want to do something for you."

"You do not have to give me anything," said Bomba, simply. "I was glad to help you."

"All the same, you'll have to take something," put in Dorn. "The question is, what shall it be? The boy can get all the food he wants, and I don't suppose he has any use for money."

"What is money?" asked Bomba.

The men laughed.

"About the most important thing in the world outside this jungle," said Gillis. "This is money," and he took a gold piece from his pouch and spun it on the rude board that served as a table.

"It is pretty," said Bomba.

"A good many people think so," remarked Gillis, dryly. "Some would sell their soul for it."

"What is a soul?" asked Bomba.

"You're getting in deep, Gillis," laughed Dorn.

"I sure am with this animated interrogation mark," returned his comrade. "The soul is the best part of us, the part that makes men good and wise and brave, that makes them different from the animals."

"Have I got a soul then?" asked Bomba.

"You sure have," replied Gillis. "And one of the best, if you ask me. But we're getting off the subject. We want to give you something that you would like to have. I wonder what it would be."

His eyes roved about and caught sight of a harmonica that lay in one of the packs they had brought along for trading with the natives.

"How would you like this?" he asked of Bomba, as he picked it up and handed it to him.

Bomba examined it curiously. He liked its smoothness and its glitter.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Let me show you," said Gillis, as he took it from him, put it to his mouth, and played a few bars of a popular air.

Bomba was amazed and delighted.

"It is like a bird!" he exclaimed. "It sings!"

"Try it yourself," said Gillis, handing it over. "Blow your breath into it and draw your breath back."

Bomba did so, and although the notes he brought from it were meaningless and discordant, they thrilled him with rapture. He could make music like the white men.

"Keep it," said Gillis, highly pleased at the lad's delight. "It's yours."

"It is good to give me this," said Bomba gratefully, as he fondled his treasure. It was the first present he had ever had in his life.

"We'd feel cheap enough if we let it go at that," said Dorn. "How about giving the boy a revolver? You saw how curious he was about firearms."

"Right enough," assented Gillis, as he went into the tent and returned with a shining new five-chambered revolver. "Here, Bomba, you liked the big iron stick. This is a little iron stick, but it does very much the same thing as the big one."

"Oh, are you going to give me that?" exclaimed Bomba, scarcely able to believe his eyes.

"Sure thing," said Gillis. "Here, let me show you how it works."

He broke the revolver, and Bomba gave a gasp of dismay.

"You broke it!" he exclaimed in grief.

"That's all right," replied Gillis. "I have to do that to load it. See, this is the way it is done."

He put cartridges in the five chambers, while Bomba watched him breathlessly. Then he snapped the stock back and looked around for a mark.

One of the dead jaguars caught his eye, and he emptied the revolver into the carcass, firing so rapidly that it seemed almost one continuous explosion.

"Now go take a look at the jaguar," said Gillis. "You'll find five holes that weren't in it before."

Bomba confirmed this with his eyes. It still seemed to him like magic, and there was awe mingled with delight in his ownership of the weapon.

"Let me put five more holes in the jaguar," he begged.

Gillis loaded it for him and gave him directions how to hold, aim, and fire the weapon, though he and Dorn took care to take their stand behind him.

In the tyro's hands only one more perforation marked the jaguar's hide, the rest missing the mark through Bomba's unfamiliarity with the weapon and his failure to allow for its kick.

"All right for a beginner," commented Gillis. "With your natural keenness of eye you'll be a crack shot as soon as you get used to the gun and have a little more practice. I only wish we had more time to teach you. But Casson will give you lessons, and in a little while you can shoot as straight with this as you can with your bow."

Many boxes of cartridges accompanied the gift, and Bomba tucked them away carefully in his pouch, feeling as rich as Croesus. It had certainly been a lucky day for him when he had come across the white men!

But his delight in his treasure was dimmed when, a little while later, all preparations were completed and the party got ready to move.

The rubber hunters themselves, steeled adventurers as they were, were deeply stirred as they shook hands with Bomba and bade him good-bye. They had become strongly attached to this lad,

who had come upon them so strangely, and to whom, no doubt, they owed their lives. There was tragic pathos in his loneliness in these vast wilds with only a half-demented old man to bear him company.

"You'll hear from us again, remember that," promised Gillis. "We're not going to let this thing drop. We will come back or send back for you."

"I hope so," said Bomba. "If you do not come, my name will be mud."

The men could not help smiling, and Bomba was proud. He was showing them that he could talk like the white men.

They waved a final farewell and took up their journey through the jungle. Bomba watched them until the underbrush hid them from view.

The world suddenly became very empty. His eyes were filled with tears.

He stood there for a long time, trying to still the ache in his heart. Then he turned his face toward the south. He must get back to Casson.

Dear old Casson! Kind old Casson! His heart thrilled with affection. He, at least, was left to him.

It was not the first time that Bomba had been away over night from the hut that sheltered him and the old naturalist. He was the provider of food, and his hunting trips had often carried

him far afield. But he was always uneasy when that occurred and anxious to get back as soon as possible, for Casson was in no condition to be left alone any more than was necessary.

Having made sure that the revolver, the harmonica, and the matches were safely bestowed in his pouch, Bomba started on his homeward journey.

Refreshed by his night's sleep and good breakfast, he made good progress for the first two hours. Then his exertions began to tell and his pace slackened, though he was still making remarkably good time, considering that for part of the way he had to hack a path through the underbrush with his machete.

On his way he passed the place of his encounter with the cooanaradi. Only the skeleton of the snake remained. And from the cleanness with which the frame had been stripped, Bomba conjectured that the ants had been at work.

Some distance further on, he came upon the ashes of a fire. Some of the embers were still smouldering and scraps of meat lay scattered about. Some natives out on a hunt had evidently stopped there for a meal.

This was a common enough occurrence and gave the lad no special concern. The Indians of the vicinity, though not especially friendly, were not hostile. They were uneasy at the presence of the

whites, whom they looked upon as intruders, but up to the present they had been content to leave them alone, and Casson and Bomba on their part had held aloof from the natives as much as possible.

So Bomba was not alarmed when he caught sight of an Indian a little to one side but moving along on a forest trail that crossed the one that he was pursuing. They reached the junction of the trails at about the same time. The Indian turned and looked at the lad.

Bomba's heart gave a sudden leap. He saw a symbol painted in ochre on the Indian's chest. It was the symbol of the head-hunters, the ferocious tribe from the Giant Cataract!

CHAPTER VI

IN THE PUMA'S DEN

BOMBA had never before come face to face with a member of the tribe of head-hunters. Only at rare intervals had any of these men of evil omen invaded that section of the jungle where he and Casson lived.

But when they had come they had left behind them a wake of death and destruction. They were cruel and ruthless. They sought for heads as the North American Indians used to seek for scalps with which to adorn their wigwams and testify to their valor.

One of these dreadful trophies hung at the belt of the Indian who now stood regarding Bomba with a scowl that sent a chill to the boy's heart.

But Bomba let no sign of apprehension show itself on his face, which had been schooled to repression and self-control by his jungle experiences.

On the contrary he smiled amicably and put up his hands, palms outward, as a sign of peace and good will.

"Good hunting, brother?" he asked, in the language that with certain variations was common to all the tribes of the region and with which he was perfectly familiar.

"Ugh!" the Indian grunted noncommittally, as he scanned Bomba with glowering eyes that had in them nothing of friendliness. "You white boy?"

"Yes," replied Bomba.

"You live with white man that has long hair and walks with a stick?" pursued the Indian.

Bomba nodded.

"The white man bad medicine," said the Indian, his scowl deepening and his hand tightening on his spear.

"He is good medicine," declared Bomba.

"He is a Man of Evil," was the reply. "He bring trouble on my people. Much sickness. Many die. Chief Nascanora very angry. He make talk with big medicine man, and medicine man say there will always be sickness as long as white man stay alive."

A thrill of apprehension ran through Bomba.

"Old white man is good man," he protested energetically. "He hurts nobody. He would like to cure people, not make them sick. He has been here many years. He is a brother. He has a good heart."

"He is a Man of Evil," repeated the other doggedly. "Medicine man say so. Medicine man

know. Tribe will have trouble, much trouble, unless old white man die."

Bomba tried to collect his thoughts, which had been thrown into a tumult by these ominous words. It came to him that perhaps this man was an emissary of death chosen by the tribe to accomplish its purpose. If this were so, Bomba, boy though he was, would have been ready to do battle with him for the life of Casson.

But if the man were not alone, if companions were near at hand, that would put another aspect on the matter. Then craft and strategy would have to make up for the disparity of numbers.

"My brother has come a long way," Bomba said, changing the subject. "The home of his people is near the Giant Cataract. Why has my brother come so far from his own people to do his hunting alone?"

"I am not alone," was the answer. "Many of my people are near me. If I call, they will come."

Bomba had learned what he wanted to know. This was but a straying member of a large party. The news was not reassuring, but it showed him where he stood. At all costs he must avoid a combat at this moment.

His revolver, fully loaded, was at his belt and, despite his unfamiliarity with the weapon, he could not have missed at such close range. But

the report would have summoned the man's companions, who were probably not far away.

So he restrained his impulse to draw it, and without any betrayal of fear smiled into the man's face, waved his hand carelessly in farewell, and passed on. In a moment the jungle had swallowed him up.

The Indian had made an instinctive movement with his spear, and then checked himself and stood undecided. The dauntless bearing of the boy disconcerted him.

Bomba, the instant he felt sure that his movements were hidden from the native, dropped his careless attitude and made his way with all the haste of which he was capable through the jungle. He must reach their hut as soon as possible and warn Casson—poor, helpless, old Casson—who would be an easy prey if the enemy came upon him unawares.

He had not gone far before he heard a loud shout behind him. This was followed a moment later by answering shouts from many directions.

He knew at once what they meant. The Indian had summoned those of his companions who happened to be within earshot. There would be a hurried gathering, a hubbub of exclamations, and then, like a pack of wild animals, they would be upon his trail.

Bomba was as lithe and strong as a young

panther, and if the going had been reasonably clear, he could probably have distanced the head-hunters. But he had the disadvantage of having to make a path in many places as he went along. He had to hack his way often through tangled thickets, and this took up precious time. His enemies, on the contrary, could follow without stopping the very path that he had made with infinite labor. It was one of the ironies of his situation that he was making the way easier for his pursuers. He was actually helping them to overtake him.

Under such conditions, it was only a matter of time before they would catch up with him. Already he could tell by the crashing of the underbrush that they were nearer.

But he kept on, spurred by desperation. His lungs were laboring, his breath coming in shorter and ever shorter gasps. He was reaching the limit of his endurance. The end could not be long delayed.

As his eyes roved frantically from right to left, he caught sight of an opening in the side of a small knoll a little way off from the direction in which he was headed.

His pursuers were close behind him now. At any moment the foremost of them might appear in sight.

Like a flash, Bomba turned in the direction of

the cave and bolted into it headlong, pitching at full length on the ground within.

He lay there in the semi-darkness panting heavily, trying to regain his breath, the little that he had left having been knocked out of him by the fall.

He could hear the rush of the pursuers as they passed by in the direction he had been heading, and he breathed a sigh of heartfelt relief as he heard their steps receding in the distance. For the moment he was saved.

But he knew this was only a reprieve. It would not be long before his enemies would realize that they were on a false trail. They would miss the sound of his steps, the marks of his machete on the bushes. Then they would retrace their steps and search every nook or cranny in which he might be hiding. And they could hardly fail to discover the cave!

As soon as he could breathe again, he rose to his feet and reconnoitered the hiding place that had, temporarily at least, proved his salvation. What his eyes could not see his touch supplied.

There was no apparent exit from the cave except the opening through which he had come. But at the back, partly hidden by a shelf of rock, was a small crevice only a few inches wide. It seemed impossible at first that it could permit the passage of his body. But by placing himself

sidewise and drawing in his breath he finally managed to worm his way through and found footing on the other side.

Now he could breathe more freely. He could crouch down in the narrow passage behind the crevice and be concealed from the sight of anyone at the entrance of the cave. To a casual observer the cave would seem empty.

And even if a careful search were made and his hiding place discovered, he would be in a natural fortress. No arrow or spear could reach him. An Indian would be too big to wriggle through that crevice, and if he tried to do so, he would be at the mercy of the lad's knife or pistol while he was making the attempt.

The first glow of exultation had barely subsided when Bomba could tell by the sounds outside that his enemies were returning. He could hear a babble of voices and grunts of rage and disappointment at the escape of their prey.

He crouched low behind his barricade, scarcely daring to breathe.

The steps came nearer and nearer.

Then suddenly there was a guttural exclamation of surprise mingled with triumph, and he knew that they had discovered the entrance to his hiding place.

The shout was followed by dead silence, which Bomba was at no loss to interpret.

His enemies knew that if he were there he would be desperate, fighting with his back against the wall. None of them was eager to be the first to enter and face him. There was no need for impetuous action. If he were there, he could not escape.

So they were drawing stealthily nearer, probably from the side, so as to escape a possible whizzing arrow, the only weapon with which they thought he would be equipped.

For some minutes the deathlike silence continued. Bomba could feel, though he could not see, that fierce, keen eyes were peering in, trying to pierce the darkness that at the back of the cave was almost absolute.

Then came a hissing sound, and a flaming torch was thrown into the cave, its flaring light illuminating every crevice of the interior.

Apparently it was empty. If the fugitive had entered there, it seemed evident that he must have escaped by some other exit.

To discover that other exit, if there were one, several of the Indians crowded into the cave, and one of them picked up the torch to make a more thorough search.

He had scarcely done so before a terrific hubbub arose from his companions on the outside of the cave. Something had frightened them.

The men within rushed out, and there was a

snapping and crashing as the whole party forced its way through the underbrush, evidently in panic flight.

What had happened? Bomba asked himself. Was one terror to be succeeded by another?

He listened with all his ears. There was no sound except that caused by the stampede of the Indians, now steadily growing fainter.

Minutes passed and still no sound. The strain became unendurable.

Slowly, very slowly, Bomba raised his head and peered over his barricade.

All he saw was a shadow.

But that was enough to chill his blood.

For the shadow that lay on the ground before the cave was that of a giant puma, one of the fiercest inhabitants of the Amazonian wilds!

The owner of the cave had returned!

CHAPTER VII

A SIEGE OF TERROR

FOR a few moments Bomba's heart seemed to cease beating.

Down he went again behind his barrier, while he tried to collect his thoughts in the presence of this new peril.

The thought that this might be the den of a wild beast had occurred to him when he first saw the mouth of the cave, but it had been crowded out by his desperate need of escaping from his human enemies.

Now he realized that he was trapped. There was not one chance in a hundred that the beast would stay outside for long. Sooner or later it would enter the cave to rest in readiness for its nocturnal hunting. And when it did come in, discovery would be certain.

In Bomba's crouching position the animal could not see him. But it would smell him and follow the scent to the crevice in the rock.

To be sure, it could not get at him. Its huge body could not squeeze through the narrow open-

ing. But when it once became convinced of this it would settle down to a long siege that would doom its captive to certain starvation.

Once more Bomba ventured a peep at the shadow. It had changed its shape. At first the beast had been standing. Now the shadow showed that it was stretched out on the ground, but with its head uplifted, watching perhaps for the possible return of the Indians that its coming had frightened off.

That shadow had a dreadful fascination for Bomba. He watched it as though under a spell, waiting for the moment when it would change in shape, when the great tawny beast would rise, shake itself, yawn, and at last enter the cave.

In the position in which Bomba found himself, he could use what weapons he had only with great difficulty. The passage was so narrow that he had no room to draw his bow. That rendered his arrows useless.

And the crevice was so located with reference to his body that he could only use his knife or revolver with his left hand.

As to hurling his knife, as he had in the case of the jaguar, he could not draw his arm back to get sufficient force for the throw. And he was so little used to the revolver, even with his right hand, that the chance of his being able to aim accurately with the left was almost negligible.

His heart sank as he realized his helplessness. He seemed doomed to die like a rat in a trap.

While he was bitterly pondering his situation, the shadow moved. Like a shot Bomba's face disappeared from the crevice through which he had been peering, and he crouched down low, fearful lest the beast should even hear the sound of his heart thumping against his ribs.

He could hear the padding feet of the puma as it leisurely entered the cave. Then there came a sudden pause, a sniff, an ominous growl.

The beast had scented the proximity of a human being. Bomba knew that its hair was bristling, its eyes glowing, as they roamed about seeking to discover the whereabouts of the intruder.

Then the padding was resumed, and the steps drew nearer his hiding place.

There was a thunderous roar and the beast dashed violently against the wall, as though it would batter it down by the sheer force of its impact.

Three times this was repeated. Then, as though recognizing the futility of this form of attack, the animal desisted. The roars were replaced with snarls, as the puma tried to force its body through the narrow opening.

It struggled viciously to get through, but its huge bulk prevented. Foiled in this, it reached

one of its great paws through the opening and swung it about, trying to get a grip with its claws on whatever was in that passage and drag it out within reach of its jaws.

Bomba shrank as far away as possible, being just able to escape the sweep of the powerful claw that would have torn into ribbons whatever it clutched.

Again and again the baffled beast sought to reach its prey, but without success.

At last it desisted and paced the floor of the cave with growls and roars that in that narrow space were almost deafening. Then it settled down to a siege. Its instinct told it that sooner or later the trapped enemy must die of starvation, or come out to meet a fate quicker but more terrible.

Bomba felt sick and weak under the strain. He had escaped that terrible paw only by inches.

His only chance seemed to be that the beast at last might sleep. Then Bomba might creep through the narrow opening and either steal from the cave or at least have elbow room to battle for his life with knife and revolver.

But he dismissed this forlorn hope even as it came to him. If the beast should doze, it would be so lightly that even the slightest sound, the fall of a leaf, would awaken him. He would be on Bomba before the latter had squeezed through

the opening. There was no hope from that quarter.

And with dread for his own safety was mingled the agonizing thought of what might happen to Casson, unwarned and helpless before the storm that was brewing. Even at this moment the head-hunters might be on their way to the lonely cabin.

An hour passed by. The snarls had ceased, but Bomba could hear the stertorous breathing that told him the beast was still there, watchful and relentless as fate.

At last he ventured a look. With infinite caution he applied his eye to the crevice in the wall. There lay the beast, a monster of its kind, its unblinking eyes turned in his direction.

But those fierce eyes had no terrors for Bomba!

Astonishment, relief, delight chased themselves over the lad's features.

His mouth opened and a low crooning sound issued from his lips, rising and falling in a weird jungle melody.

The effect on the puma was magical. It started to its feet. The fierce light faded from its eyes, and was replaced with a look of pleasure and benevolence. Then it commenced to purr.

"Polulu!" murmured Bomba. "Polulu! It is Bomba speaking—Bomba, your friend."

The purring grew louder, and the great beast came and rubbed itself against the wall.

Bomba hesitated no longer. He forced his body through the crevice without the slightest trepidation, though with some difficulty, for already the puma was rubbing his head against him, fawning upon him like a cat, and trying to lick his hand.

"Polulu. Polulu," murmured Bomba, as he caressed the great head fondly. "Why did I not know it was you? I would not have hidden from you. You have given Bomba a great fright."

Polulu purred still more loudly and rubbed his head so hard against Bomba as to almost knock him over. Then the beast lay down and rolled over and over to testify his joy at the meeting.

For the last two years a warm affection had existed between the two. It had taken birth at the time the big puma had been caught by a falling tree that had imprisoned and broken one of its hind legs.

Bomba had come upon the tortured animal at a time when it was suffering terribly and biting savagely at the injured leg. The boy was stirred with compassion. He had a strange power over animals, and the puma had sensed his sympathy.

Bomba had brought the animal food and water. Then he had set to work to free the trapped leg. This accomplished, he had set and bound up the injured member, the puma submitting to the treat-

ment because it knew instinctively the kindness that prompted it.

Many days had passed before it was able to stand and get about, and during all this time Bomba had supplied its needs and nursed it back to health. By the time this was accomplished, the puma had all the affection for Bomba that a pet cat has for its master.

Repeatedly since then the paths of the two had crossed in the jungle, each time to the joy of both. At times, Polulu had been accompanied by its savage mates that would have attacked the boy had not Polulu taken him under his guard and warned the others that the boy must be immune.

For some minutes Bomba fondled and caressed the great beast, which responded with equal affection and manifestations of delight.

Then the pressing need for haste forced itself on the boy, and with a parting pat on the tawny head he rose and issued from the cave.

Polulu was disappointed at the briefness of the lad's stay, and made as though he would go with him. But Bomba gently waved him back and the puma obeyed meekly. And in the lambent yellow eyes that stared after him Bomba could read regret and desolation.

Immeasurably relieved in mind as the boy was at his unexpected escape at the moment that death

had seemed to be closing in on him, he was tormented by the thought of the precious time that had been lost by his enforced stay in the cave. Now he must redouble his speed, at the same time keeping a sharp lookout for the marauding Indians.

He came to the banks of a wide stream that wound in a sweeping curve through the jungle. To swim across it would save him a long detour on land and at least an hour of time.

Ordinarily he would have taken the land route, with whose dangers he was more familiar and better able to cope. He had a deep fear of the caymans, the great South American alligators, that infested many of the streams.

He could swim like a fish. But the alligators could also make amazing speed, considering their clumsiness. And in the water the only weapon the boy could use effectively would be his knife, and that would be but of slender use against such a formidable foe.

He knew, however, that at this time in the day the alligators would be apt to be sunning themselves on some of the islands that studded the stream at intervals. One of these islands he could see at a little distance, with dark forms like so many logs fast asleep on the sands.

His resolve was made on the instant. He would take the chance.

Silently as a shadow he slipped into the water, and, swimming so smoothly that he scarcely left a ripple behind him, he moved toward the point he had in view.

He had traversed more than half the distance and was already beginning to congratulate himself on the successful outcome of his venture when he heard a splash behind him.

Something had broken the surface of the water.

He looked behind him and his heart skipped a beat.

He saw the dripping head and great open jaws of a huge cayman coming toward him!

CHAPTER VIII

THE JAWS OF DEATH

AT sight of the cayman, Bomba, for one awful instant, felt as though he were paralyzed. Strength seemed suddenly to have left his arms and legs.

But only for a moment. The next instant the instinct of self-preservation asserted itself, and he shot forward like an arrow.

He knew he could not reach the shore before the dreadful thing would be upon him. But he would struggle till the last. As a final resource he had his knife.

But what would that knife avail against murderous jaws armed with a score of knives? One nip from those jaws could sever his leg from his body, or, if they caught him at the waist, could bite him in half.

His arms and legs were working like piston-rods. He was fairly leaping through the water. But behind him was coming a fearsome thing that could swim still faster.

Still Bomba sped on, his eyes fixed on the land

steadily drawing nearer, even though the lad had the conviction that his feet would never press that land again.

The muscles in his strong arms were strained until it seemed as though they would burst. He breathed with difficulty. His head, surcharged with blood, felt as though it were encircled by an iron band that was eating its way into it.

One hurried glance over his shoulder showed him that the cayman was gaining. The distance between them had sensibly diminished.

As a whole world of thoughts is said to pass through the brain of a drowning man, so Bomba reviewed in those terrible moments the things that had come into his life.

One thought tore a sob from his aching throat. It was of Casson, poor, gentle, bewildered Casson, left alone to face the perils of the jungle, the jaguar, the sucurujus, the dreaded boa constrictor, and those human foes, perhaps more terrible still, bent on his destruction.

There was another grief, a longing bitterly poignant though but vaguely understood, that stirred his soul to the depths with agony.

The white men! He would never know now about that mysterious world from which they had come, to which at this moment they were returning. He would not know. He would not know!

The words beat themselves over and over in

his brain, while his straining muscles labored to snatch a few more moments from eternity.

He cast one more look behind him. The hideous brute was nearer now, the fangs in its frightful jaws gleaming as the cayman clove the water.

Now it was close upon him! Bomba's legs were instinctively drawn up to his body to escape the slash of those dreadful jaws. His hand reached for his knife.

What was that his dimming eyes saw directly ahead of him? Bomba's heart leaped with renewed hope as he saw that the flat object floating almost within his reach was a rude raft—four hollow logs strapped together with bush cord. The work of caboclos, probably, who had later discarded it for a more convenient mode of river travel—the *regatao* or river canoe.

Could he reach it? The splashing of the alligator was close behind him. The brute was preparing for its spring. Every moment Bomba expected to feel the clamp of those iron jaws, to be dragged beneath the swirling surface to the slime and ooze of the river bed, to be feasted on at leisure.

The boy summoned all his expiring strength in one last effort. A mighty spurt carried him a few feet ahead. He must get hold of that raft. It spelled safety, deliverance from a horrible fate. Extinction threatened him, and like any

other creature of the wild he fought madly for his life.

Another moment and those hungry jaws would fasten on him, tear his straining soul from his mangled body.

Now the raft was only an inch from his frantic fingers—half an inch! He touched it! He grasped it, lifted himself, slipped back, made one last effort, pulled himself out and sprawled at full length upon the raft!

He was not a second too soon. Even as he fell prone, two vicious jaws snapped savagely. The cayman lurched against the raft, tipping it to such an angle that Bomba was almost thrown into the water.

But the boy held on desperately, and the raft righted itself.

Again the brute returned to the attack. This time it flung its body half upon the raft and its jaws snapped within an inch of the lad's legs.

There was a heavy paddle lying on the raft. Bomba snatched it up and brought it down with all his force on the cayman's snout.

The brute winced, but still continued its efforts to climb up on the frail structure. Then Bomba jammed the stick through the gaping jaws deep into the brute's throat.

There was a grunt of pain and rage, and the cayman fell back into the water that was speedily

died with the blood that came from the wound. There was no more fight left in the creature. It swam around for a moment, glaring with its malignant eyes at the human banquet it had counted on, and then sank slowly from sight.

Bomba had won. But it had been a terrific experience. He sat down on the raft, too utterly worn out for the moment to move a finger.

But if his body was exhausted, his mind was still active. The same subjects that had tormented him a few minutes ago in his dreadful extremity now appeared in a roseate glow.

The white men! He would see them again. Or if not Gillis and Dorn, others of their kind. His kind, too, he thought with a thrill of exultation.

As he lay there, his brown body glistening with river water might have belonged to any native Amazonian. His sturdy body and rippling muscles, too, might have been those of a caboclo, a native waterman.

But not his eyes. The dreaming look that now clouded their bright watchfulness was a heritage of white men—the striving of a soul for ascendancy over mere physical things, the yearning for something higher than an animal existence.

And he was white! He knew it! And those men, those beings from another world, had acknowledged that he was white. They knew. They must know everything. And he had not had with

them the alien feeling that had always been his when he had come in contact with the Indians. He had felt at home with these white men. He liked them. They had liked him.

But now they were gone. When would he see them again?

They had been his friends. They had given him presents. He touched the gifts with reverent fingers. But the men had gone. Where? To some mysterious place utterly beyond his comprehension, where white men talked and laughed a great deal and slapped each other on the back.

It must be a friendly country, thought Bomba wistfully, as he looked about on the stream and jungle where so few things were friendly. He, too, would like to talk and laugh a great deal and slap people—white people—on the back.

He had never talked much. Cody Casson was reticent. He had never laughed much. Casson was somber.

He would like to bring about a change in the quiet little hut, to talk and laugh with Casson. But if he could not have done that before, how could he do it now? Casson was no longer wise. He had forgotten all that could be talked about. He was like a little child again, to be watched over and guarded from evil.

The thought of Casson put an end to his musings. Once more he was Bomba, the jungle-

trained and bred, with all the wily cunning of the jungle in his eyes. No longer were those eyes dreaming, but bright and watchful as had been those of old Geluk, the puma, whose skin Bomba now wore as covering.

With the paddle which had done him such good service in warding off the attack of the alligator he rapidly propelled the rude raft toward the jutting point where he intended to make his landing.

He soon touched and leaped upon the shore. Before him stretched a ygapo, a huge swamp many miles in width. This must be crossed before he could reach the hut. The only alternative was a roundabout route. But the feeling that Casson might at any minute be in danger urged the boy to take the shorter cut.

Nevertheless, he hated the swamp. Vaguely he imagined it peopled with evil spirits. The tall crabwood trees standing in clusters threw deep shadows over the blackish-brown water, giving it an indescribably dreary and sinister appearance. Here and there, out of the slimy ooze sprang huge tree ferns. No shrieking of parrots or howling of monkeys in this cheerless spot. Nothing but dead leaves and treacherous mud, without the stir of a leaf or the twitter of a bird to break the brooding silence. It might have been a lost fragment flung off from a vanished world.

Bomba made his way rapidly through the ygapo, heavily oppressed by the premonition that danger lurked about the hut of Casson. In one hand he firmly grasped his faithful machete, while in the other he held the revolver, the cherished gift of the white man.

His eyes scanned the coverts for the first sign of danger. There was little peril from wild beasts, who preferred the dry woodland, but he knew that reptiles might start from the slime or drop down upon him from the trees.

He found no use, however, for either weapon while traversing the swamp. It was not until he was nearly across the ygapo that an acrid scent assailed his nostrils.

Fire!

He was not alarmed at first. It was probably only Casson's campfire built outside the hut.

But in a moment he knew that the volume of smoke wafted to him by a vagrant breeze could come from no ordinary bonfire, and his steps quickened.

He reached the farther end of the ygapo. He drew himself up to the higher level, and with relief felt solid ground beneath his feet once more.

Bomba plunged onward, the increasing density of the smoke lending wings to his feet. No thought of Gillis and Dorn in the jungle lad's

mind now! Only room there for thought of Cody Casson! Would he reach the hut and the old man in time?

It took Bomba only a short time to reach the trees that fringed the clearing he and Casson had made.

A glance as he burst into the open told him that his worst fears were realized.

The hut was in flames!

CHAPTER IX

FROM OUT THE FLAMES

IN a few bounds Bomba was close beside the blazing hut.

As he rushed forward he shouted hoarsely:
"Casson! Casson! Where are you?"

A groan was his only answer. But it was enough, for it told him that his only friend and comrade was entrapped within. Already he might have been burned beyond any possibility of rescue.

Bomba acted quickly. The cloth about his body had been saturated during his progress through the swamp. This he tore from him and swiftly bound it about his nose and mouth. For this much he knew—that to inhale that writhing, forked-tongue demon men called fire meant certain death.

To adjust the cloth took but a few seconds. Gathering his wiry muscles beneath him, he sprang for the flame-filled doorway of the hut.

For a moment it seemed to him that the whole world was an inferno of flame. His flesh was seared by the terrific heat.

Then he was through it! The interior of the hut was filled with smoke, the heat almost unbearable. Bomba's eyes were smarting, blinded. He could only grope about, stumbling, calling to Casson in a strange, cracked voice.

He almost gave up hope. He decided that Casson and he must perish there together. Then his groping fingers touched something that moved and groaned.

Could he get Casson outside the hut before the flimsy walls of it collapsed, burying both of them in the burning debris?

Even as Bomba asked himself the question, he gathered the wasted form of Casson in his strong young arms.

Choking, blinded, staggering, he stumbled with his burden in the direction he thought the doorway would be. He came in violent contact with a wall, and was almost flung down with his helpless burden.

His lungs fairly begging for a breath of air, eyes smarting agonizingly with smoke, he regained his balance and struggled on.

He pressed Casson's nose and mouth close against the cloth that covered his own and groped forward until at last he found the doorway of the hut. A moment's pause, a gathering of forces, then a mad plunge through the devouring flame into the open air beyond.

Bomba laid Casson on the ground at a safe distance from the blazing structure, and with a swift motion tore the cloth from his own nose and mouth. This, which had begun to scorch from the frightful heat, he flung to the ground and trampled upon with his sandaled feet.

Then he passed a hand over his smarting, tear-filled eyes, and bent to examine Casson.

The old naturalist was conscious, and looked up at the boy with a pleading look.

"I'm all right," he panted, his breath coming painfully. "Never mind me. Save the hut."

Weak as he was, he half-raised himself on his elbow and stared wildly at the hut, the only home he knew.

Bomba with one hand pushed the old man back not ungently on the ground.

"Bomba will put out fire," he said, in the soothing tones one would use to a frightened child. "You sit quiet, Casson. Watch."

Without further delay, Bomba set to work to save the threatened habitation that had sheltered him and his companion for so many years.

Luckily, the bulk of the fire was thus far confined to one part of the hut. Bomba picked up a bucket, used by Casson and himself to boil the game that the boy's hunting expeditions brought back to the cabin.

With this he worked like a madman, carrying water from a stream that ran a few yards in the rear and dashing it over the untouched portions of the hut.

When this was thoroughly saturated, he began work with his machete tearing down one flaming wall and then beating out the fire with a huge palm-leaf broom that Casson had used to keep the interior neat.

It was hard and discouraging work. More than once Bomba felt that he was fighting a losing battle. Not only was the hut in danger of being destroyed, but the jungle to the rear of it was threatened.

Many of the trees near by were rubber trees, and this thought helped to spur Bomba to renewed activity. Those were the kind of trees that Gillis and Dorn had been seeking—seeking for the Apex Rubber Corporation, whatever that might mean.

Bomba had no idea of the millions of rubber trees there must be in the length and breadth of the Amazonian jungle. All he knew was that the white men regarded them as precious. Very well then, he would guard these from fire until Gillis and Dorn should come to claim them. It was good to be able to do something for these white men who had been so good to him.

So to save the trees as well as his home, he

toiled on with dogged persistence, while Casson watched him with feverish, half-wild eyes.

It was a long time coming, but victory came at last. Half of the hut had been torn or burned away and the last smoldering spark had been extinguished.

Tired, his brown skin scorched in a dozen places, the boy flung himself down beside Casson, panting.

"You see," he said, his bright eyes full of triumph, "Bomba did not let the fire touch the rubber trees."

Casson looked puzzled.

"Rubber trees?" he repeated vaguely.

"Back there," said Bomba, with a wave of his hand. "White men want rubber trees. They hunt them with the caboclos. I save some for them."

There was a boyish elation in his tone that penetrated even Casson's bewildered senses. He put out a wavering hand to Bomba, and for the first time noticed how badly the boy was burned.

"You will blister," he said.

Bomba looked down indifferently at his bronzed skin.

"Yes," he returned. "You are burned, too."

Without further speech, he rose silently and disappeared in the jungle. He reappeared a short time later, carrying handfuls of the river mud.

This he smeared thickly over Casson's hands and face, tearing open the tattered shirt of the old naturalist to see if his chest was burned.

Then he vanished again, to return with more mud which he spread over his own burns. Then he sat down beside the old man for a few minutes of well-earned rest.

"The hut is bad," he said, after a few moments of contemplation. "It is almost half gone. I will fix it."

Cody Casson made no reply.

He was a frail old man, bent with the weight of what seemed at least seventy years. He had a finely shaped head and features that must have once been pleasing, though now deeply seamed with the wrinkles of exposure and hardship. His expression was kindly and benignant. His eyes were blue and had once been clear and penetrating, though now they had the bewildered vacuous look that comes to the half demented.

As he sat there now he seemed to be puzzling over something. Presently he looked up at Bomba with an expression that the boy knew well, having seen it there many times before.

The aged man was trying to remember, trying to recall something concerning past events of his own life of which Bomba knew nothing.

"You said"—Casson spoke slowly and painfully as though trying to force his thoughts to

keep pace with his words—"you said something about—white men. You mean—what did you mean?"

A curious shyness fell on Bomba. He could not tell Cody Casson all that was in his mind concerning these white men, could not explain to him the vague but enchanting vistas this chance meeting with his kind had opened up to him. How could he explain to another what he could hardly explain to himself? He was a creature of the wild, inarticulate, feeling the more deeply because he had no words adequate to express his thoughts.

Questioned now by Casson, he could give only the bare facts concerning his encounter with the rubber hunters, how he had made his way to them following the report of the iron stick, how he had helped them fight off the hungry jaguars, and how subsequently they had presented him with the harmonica, the matches, and the revolver.

He exhibited these treasures with great pride, and even played a few weird and mournful notes on the harmonica.

"This," he lifted the revolver carefully in one brown hand, "they said you would show me how to use. They told me something about it. It is like your iron stick. It shoots blue fire and a thing they call a cartridge. See, they gave me some of them," and with face eager and eyes

glowing he brought forth the boxes of ammunition.

Casson was staring at the jungle boy in a queer, half-fascinated way. Bomba was frightened. He broke off in the midst of what he was saying and timidly touched the arm of the old man.

"You are sick?" he asked anxiously. "I will go to the ygapo and bring back herbs."

He was half-way to his feet when Casson's nervous grip on his arm halted him.

"No, no! I am not sick!" he cried. "You are a white boy, as white as those men are. You should not be living here, buried in the jungle. All right for an old man, all right for—old—Casson." The disjointed sentence wavered into silence.

Bomba regarded the old man eagerly, anxiously. In his heart a strange excitement was throbbing. Was the door that at times had been partly opened to be swung wide at last? Was he to learn something about—what strange words had the white men used?"—"folks," "relations"?

That he was white he had known for a long time and secretly exulted in it. But what did it mean to be white?

Primarily he knew that it referred to the color of the skin. His was different from that of the

caboclos that ranged the rivers, different from that of the Indians who lived in the heart of the jungle.

But it must mean more than that. To be white meant not only to look different, but to act differently, to think differently, to live differently. What inner thing was it that made those who wore white skin for a covering, like himself and Casson and Gillis and Dorn, different from the brown or copper-skinned natives?

It was a problem too deep for Bomba, a problem that perplexed while it fascinated. Instinctively he knew that Cody Casson had the answer, or at least that he had possessed it in the days before the explosion of the fire stick.

The boy turned to the naturalist with a movement animal-like in its swiftness. He wanted to question him, to find out the truth, but he did not know how to begin.

But Cody Casson, groping in his mind, spoke suddenly of his own accord.

"I try to remember," he muttered while Bomba bent closer to him, anxious to let not a word escape. "I try, but something closes like a door in my mind, locking me out, locking me out——"

It was pitiable to see him trying to goad his poor twisted brain into action. Bomba sat as though carved in stone, fearing that any move-

ment on his part might hinder the revelation that seemed on the brink of utterance.

Casson began again, the words coming more quickly and with feverish intensity.

"It is for you I want to remember, Bomba; for you! I owe it to you. I am trying to think, trying—the door again—Bomba, help me to push back the door. There, I almost had it! Bartow—push, push hard, Bomba—trying to remember—Laura, dear sweet Laura—Oh, I can't! I can't! The door is shut. Gone—gone——"

The last word was a shriek.

With a groan of despair, Cody Casson turned over on his face, thin, veined hands outflung to clutch the jungle growth, his form convulsed with a passion of sobs.

CHAPTER X

THE SHOUT OF WARNING

THIS emotional outbreak on the part of Casson disturbed and puzzled Bomba.

Before it, he remained inarticulate, dumb, though there stirred in him a great longing to comfort his companion. The white men, he thought, would have slapped him on the back and laughed and made him feel better.

But Bomba could not do this. A strange embarrassment restrained him. So he sat and looked at Casson and suffered with him and said nothing.

The storm was short-lived. Casson's groping fingers unclenched, and a long sigh shuddered through his frame.

Seeing this, Bomba gently turned him over, and, gathering some fallen leaves, placed them as a cushion beneath Casson's head.

"You wait and rest here," he ordered. "I will go and get some herbs."

This time Casson made no objection to his going. He seemed exhausted, apathetic. His poor bruised mind no longer strove for memory.

It was doubtful that he even knew Bomba had left him.

The lad returned after a while with a handful of herbs. Over these he poured some river water and set the pot upon a small heap made of a few crossed sticks.

Bomba brought forth the precious supply of "fire sticks," as he mentally named the matches Gillis and Dorn had given him, intending to light the fire with one of them.

With a feeling of great excitement he struck one upon a stone near by. This had been, while in the white men's camp, an ever recurrent miracle, the quick spurt of flame that followed the scratching of this strange little stick along a rough surface.

But to his astonishment and utter chagrin the fire stick failed him. There was no response to his quick stroke upon the rock.

Bomba sat back upon his heels and regarded the match with frowning attention. Here was something he could not understand. Under the direction of the rubber-hunters, he had struck fire from the stick as easily as they had themselves. What then was the matter now?

He tried another match and then another, but when they still failed to give forth their magic fire, Bomba threw them from him with angry violence.

With a grunt of disgust he had recourse to his old standbys of bowl and stick, and soon had the fire going merrily.

Bomba was disturbed and worried by the incident. He could not know that the matches had been ruined for the time during his swim in the rushing waters of the river. Neither Gillis nor Dorn had thought to tell him that water was bad for these queer fire sticks.

So Bomba reasoned that the fault must lie with him. He must have lost his cunning since he had left the white man's camp. In a vague way he felt that he was sinking back again, back into that morass of ignorance and loneliness from which his brief acquaintance with the white men had inspired him with the wish to raise himself.

Was he white after all, except in the color of his skin? Had he not lived in the jungle too long to hope to escape to that other and mysterious one, so utterly different from the one in which he had been brought up? He was sure that Gillis or Dorn could have struck that match. How far he was below them! Would he ever be able to stand on a plane with them?

But he dismissed these gloomy forebodings and turned to the work at hand. The boiling herbs in the pot sent up a stifling, aromatic odor. Bomba had learned the secret of herb medicine from Candido, a poor half-witted caboclo who

traveled from place to place living on turtles' eggs and fish and such game as he could manage to bring down with his arrows.

Candido was the only native who had ever shown any friendliness toward Bomba. He had told the boy the secret of the herb medicine, and had taught him where to search for the spindly little plant along the river's edge.

Since then this primitive medicine had served as Bomba's stock remedy for all the ills of Casson and himself. It had remarkable healing and tonic qualities. Bomba had once taken it internally for snake bite, and since he had not died, believed implicitly ever afterward in the panacea of Candido, the half-witted caboclo.

So now, when it had acquired the proper consistency, he made a leaf cup and poured some of the steaming liquid into it. Lifting Casson to a sitting position, he put the primitive cup to his lips and commanded that he drink.

"You will feel good," he declared, and Casson obediently swallowed the dose.

Casson shortly afterward seemed greatly revived. He insisted on sitting up, his back propped against a tree. From this vantage point he watched Bomba as the boy prepared to clear away the ruins of the fire.

The jungle boy worked hard and fast. It was no easy task to clear away the débris, much of it

still hot and smouldering, and night was coming on. Later he would rebuild the damaged side of the hut. For the present it was sufficient that he arrange some sort of bed for Casson and build a fire that would keep the prowling beasts of the forest at a safe distance.

While he worked, Bomba could feel the wistful eyes of Casson upon him. He knew that the old naturalist was again groping, trying to swing open that "closed door" in his mind.

The work was done at last. Leaves and branches for a bed had been dragged within the hut. The fire was built far enough from the cabin not to endanger it, but still close enough to warn off nocturnal marauders.

Bomba went for water to the stream that flowed back of the dwelling, and, returning, set the pot once more upon the fire, this time to prepare the evening meal.

There was no food about the place, for Bomba had brought none back from his trip to the white man's camp. He was about to go into the forest, weary as he was, in search of some sort of game, when Casson's faint voice called to him.

"There are turtle eggs," he said. "I found them this afternoon when I was watching the ciganas, those big brown birds with the splendid crowns. They are there, the eggs, beyond that large flat stone."

He pointed to the cache where he had concealed the spoils of the afternoon.

Gratefully, Bomba seized upon the eggs and plunged them into the boiling water. Turtle eggs were ever a luxury for the jungle-bred palate.

When they were ready, Bomba brought them to Casson, and the two sat cross-legged upon the ground to eat the simple repast.

Bomba was tired and ravenous. He consumed several of the eggs in jungle fashion by clipping off the tops and then squeezing the shell in both hands until yolk and white were forced through the opening. It was some time before his appetite was sufficiently appeased to permit of conversation.

Then he said to Casson:

"Why did you stay inside the hut when it was in flames? If I had not come just when I did, you would have been burned to death."

Casson nodded and passed a hand across his forehead in bewildered fashion.

"That is what puzzles me," he said. "I had walked so far through the jungle that I was very tired, and flung myself down to rest. I must have fallen asleep, and when I woke the hut was full of smoke. I guessed what had happened at once, and tried to rise to make my way from the place. But there was no strength in me——"

"The smoke made you blind?" suggested Bomba.

"No." Again that pitiful gesture of bewilderment. "My brain was clear. I was not dazed, as though from the smoke. It was weakness. I could not move. I knew that unless you came and rescued me, I must lie there and be burned."

Bomba pondered this, brow furrowed. He was greatly worried about Casson. The old man must be weaker than he had thought. Bomba must take good care of him.

And this led him to speak of the Indians, the thought of whom had been driven from his mind by the excitement of the fire.

"It is not safe for you to go far into the jungle," he warned the old man. "The head-hunters have come from the Giant Cataract. They will kill you if they find you when I am not there."

Casson shrugged his shoulders. He had long since ceased to regard his life of great value.

"I am not afraid," he said simply.

"But I am afraid for you," said Bomba. "They have bad hearts. Some in their tribe have been sick and some have died. They say you do this. They say if they kill you, their men and women will not be sick."

Casson smiled faintly.

"They are foolish men," he said. "I have

never done harm to anyone. I would rather do them good if I could."

"I know," said Bomba. "I said that to one of them. I told him you were a brother, a good man. But he would not listen. The medicine man has said that you must die."

Still Casson's interest was only slight.

"They are like children," he replied. "They think one thing to-day and another thing to-morrow. Then, too, they come from far off, and they do not know this part of the jungle. They might search for months and not find us."

Such optimism made Bomba desperate. What could he do against the listless indifference of one who cared but little whether he lived or died?

"They do not know where we are," he admitted; "but the caboclos who live here know. They may catch one of them and hurt him and tell him they will kill him if he does not tell them where we live. Then he will tell them."

"Well, suppose he does?" sighed Casson wearily. "And suppose they come? We will do our best. We can do no more. Maybe we can talk to them and show them how foolish they are. If we have to fight, we will do that. If they kill us we cannot help it."

But this calm fatalism was by no means to Bomba's liking. Life ran strong in his veins,

and he was determined to preserve it as long as possible.

"Listen," he said. "I will make this house as strong as I can. I will pile rocks against the walls. And there is the boat in the stream behind the hut. If you hear them coming or see signs of them in the jungle, get into the boat and row down the river. They will have no boats. And the river leaves no tracks. I will learn how to use the fire stick. It will frighten them, if they hear it. Maybe they will think that we have magic and will go away."

They were but slender props on which the boy leaned, but his stout heart did not quail at the odds against him. The life in the jungle—the jungle itself—was always against him, but his quick wit and unfailing courage had brought him through so far, and he dauntlessly faced the future.

For a long time after this the man and the boy sat in silence. Casson was wandering in some vague land of his own. Bomba kept repeating to himself over and over the words that had fallen from the old man's lips, "Bartow" and "Laura."

What had Casson meant? What had he been upon the point of telling?

Bomba did not know. But he was sure of one thing—that he would never forget those two words. Some day, perhaps, he would find out

what they meant. But how? Would that closed door in Casson's mind open? Would the jungle boy have to search for the knowledge he craved in the outside world—the world of the white men?

Bomba slept fitfully that night. Several times he was up to replenish the fire. Only toward morning did he fall into a heavy sleep.

He was aroused at last by a cry from Casson—a cry of fear and horror.

Another shout, this time of warning, from the old man:

“Bomba!”

CHAPTER XI

THE VAMPIRES ATTACK

BOMBA was awake instantly. He strove to rise, but fell back heavily. His limbs seemed weighted with iron.

At the same moment another shrill cry from Casson reached him!

"Vampires! The blood-sucking vampires! Quick, Bomba! Quick!"

As Bomba's eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom of the hut they caught sight of the horrid creature that had provoked Casson's cry of warning—a blood-sucking vampire bat, as large as a hawk, with a spread of over two feet across the wings.

True to its habits, it had attacked its victim while the latter was sleeping. It had settled on Bomba's feet and started to suck his blood, while its great flapping wings kept up a gentle fanning motion, designed to soothe the lad and keep him asleep as long as possible.

Bomba had been so exhausted from his exertions of the day before that the bat's task had

been easy, and it had been able to prey on him for a long time undisturbed.

In a flash Bomba knew what had happened to him. This, then, was the reason for that strange numbed feeling in his legs. Much of his blood must have passed from him to the vampire to render him so weak.

The bat was still at his feet, draining him of the vital fluid, flapping, flapping those terrible wings with a lulling motion.

A wild fury assailed Bomba, rage at his own impotence.

With a tremendous effort, he raised himself to a sitting posture and moved his half-paralyzed legs.

The vampire left its perch on Bomba's foot and flapped into the air a short distance, its vicious, beady eyes fastened malignantly on the boy's face. Bomba knew that the terrible creature, with the cunning instinct of its kind, was aware of his weakness, and would not easily be frightened off.

At the same moment there was another cry from Casson, and two other sinister shapes flapped their way into the half-ruined hut.

Bomba gave a hoarse cry, staggered to his feet and reached for the heavy club that he always kept close by his side when he slept. With the

other hand he grasped his machete and turned grimly to face the invaders.

But even as he turned, he staggered and almost fell. He was horribly weak. He could hardly hold the weapons. It was a gigantic effort even to lift them above his head.

He called to Casson, hoping for some help from the old man. But the aged naturalist was sitting upright on his improvised couch of boughs and palm leaves, and his eyes were fixed with the bewildered, half-fascinated look of a frightened child upon the horrible winged intruders.

Bomba groaned. Lifting the machete with a tremendous effort—he had already discarded the club, finding the weight of both weapons too much for him—he made a feeble advance upon the enemy.

There was a whirring of wings, and the hideous creatures swooped down on him in a black, loathsome cloud.

Bomba gave way before the fury of the onslaught, striking at them with the machete, while with the other arm he shielded his face from the batting of those merciless wings.

Sensing his weakness, the bats became more bold and vicious. They pressed upon him, striking him about the head and body. There was a sharp pain in the arm that shielded his face,

and Bomba felt a trickle of blood run slowly down to his finger tips.

He lowered the shielding arm and shook the blood from his fingers. He wielded the machete again, and this time found a mark. But the blow was weak, and far from seriously injuring his foe seemed only to have the effect of further enraging it.

There was a second fierce attack, and beneath the flailing of wings Bomba found himself borne to the floor.

In the fall the machete dropped from his hands.
Weaponless! Helpless!

In a fury of impotence, Bomba beat at the bats with both fists. He struck out wildly, blindly. But his wily enemies avoided the blows and pressed him the more viciously.

Bomba could not see that Casson had slipped from his bed and was staggering to his feet. Even if he had, he would have felt but little hope. Before Casson in his enfeebled state could be of any assistance, Bomba's need of help would be over.

The furious attack of his fists had kept the enemy at bay for only a few seconds, and now Bomba was utterly exhausted. His muscles refused to obey the commands of his will. His hands fell limp, and again the vampires settled upon him.

The arms with which he tried to protect his face were bitten a score of times. Blood welled from the wounds. One of the vampires had settled upon his chest. Its weight seemed to be crushing Bomba, smothering him. The next moment he expected it to be at his throat.

With a hoarse cry he threw out one arm. His fingers touched something cold and hard. The revolver, the gift of the white men!

What was it that thrilled Bomba as his fingers closed upon the barrel of the weapon? What meant the excitement that coursed through his weakened body as his finger felt the trigger? A feeling inherited from generations of white ancestors; the sensation of almost limitless power that the touch of a firearm brings to its possessor?

With all his remaining strength Bomba called for Casson to get out of the way.

"Fire stick! Shoot!" he cried, and Casson, understanding, backed into a far corner of the hut.

Bomba's arm was throbbing and paining. He was bruised and beaten by those powerful wings. He felt as though almost the last ounce of strength had been drained from him. That sensation of overpowering weakness warned him that he must act quickly if he were to act at all.

Slowly he lifted the revolver and pressed it

against the body of the bat that rested on his breast.

The boy shut his eyes, held his breath, and pulled the trigger.

There was a loud report, a curiously throttled squawk close to his ear, and what had been a vampire bat was now but a gory mass huddled on the ground.

The noise of the shot had frightened the other two marauders, and they hovered about fanning the air with their great wings, manifestly uncertain whether to return to the attack or take refuge in flight.

Relieved of the weight of them, Bomba raised himself unsteadily on his left elbow and again lifted the magic gift of the white men.

Despite his fatigue, his weakness from loss of blood, Bomba was fiercely exultant. He had done with this wonderful weapon what he had failed to do with the club and the machete.

But there was small time allowed him for jubilation. The vampires, the first moment of panic passed, evidently resolved not to let their prey escape them and again returned viciously to the attack.

This time Bomba was ready for them.

Casson, watching from the remote corner of the hut, saw the boy slowly lift the weapon. Bomba waited until the first of the assailants was

almost upon him. He was by no means sure of his skill with this death-dealing weapon, and he meant to take no chances of the bullet going wild.

There came a second report, another wild flapping of wings, and he had lessened the odds against him by half. But the remaining vampire kept on straight for Bomba's head.

Bomba pulled the trigger again, but only an ominous click answered him. Twice he tried again desperately, and with the same result.

And now the vampire was fairly upon him.

Acting purely on instinct, Bomba shifted the revolver in his hand, and with the butt end of it struck at his enemy. He hit the bat full on its ugly head, and it fell stunned to the floor.

Bomba did not know whether it was dead or not. But he meant to make certain, and he struck at the bat again and again until it was a mass of pulp.

The battle was over. It had been like a struggle in a nightmare. In every other fight in which he had ever engaged he had been in the full possession of his senses. His courage, his agility, his strength had been at his command. But in this fearful combat the loss of blood before he awoke and the resultant physical weakness had put him under a terrible handicap.

But the soul of him had not failed. His in-

domitable fighting spirit had brought him through a victor.

He lay there panting, and it was some time before he could struggle to his feet.

He shoved the carcasses of the vampires from him with a disgusted grunt. Then he balanced the revolver in his hand and stared at it with a strange gleam in his eyes.

"I am like the white men now," he said to Casson, as the latter crawled over to him. "I can use the fire stick!"

CHAPTER XII

KIKI, WOOWOO AND DOTO

BOMBA'S exultation subsided somewhat when he recalled the fact that the much-prized weapon had failed to work the last time he had pulled the trigger.

"It is broken and there are no white men here to give me another," he groaned.

Casson took it in his shaking fingers and examined it. Long years before he had been an expert shot with both rifle and revolver and was thoroughly familiar with their mechanisms.

He broke the stock and examined the chambers.

"This is what is the trouble," he said, as he saw that the chambers were empty. "It can't shoot if there's nothing in there to shoot. You didn't have it fully loaded."

"But it was loaded when I left the white man's camp!" Bomba replied. Then he remembered that he had been tempted to try his marksmanship on a tree the day before and had thus disposed of three of his cartridges.

His relief was great at this solution of the mystery, and he reloaded the weapon forthwith, mentally recording a vow that never again would he go to sleep or sally forth into the jungle without the revolver containing the full five missiles, any one of which might spell the difference between life and death.

A sudden thought occurred to him as he shoved the bodies of the vampires out of the door.

"Perhaps one of them had been here before," he said to Casson, "and that is what made him come back with others to-night."

"What makes you think that?" asked the old man, looking at him with some surprise.

"Because you were so weak when I found you in the hut," replied Bomba. "The bat may have been sucking your blood when you lay asleep. Then the fire came and the smoke frightened the bat away. But he had taken so much of your blood that you had no strength left to get outside the door."

"I hadn't thought of that; but it may be so," replied Casson. "I know I never felt so weak before. I felt as if I could not move hand or foot. And perhaps that is the reason I could not help you to-night. I wanted to. I tried to. I would have given my life to get to your side. But I could not."

Though he could hardly drag one foot after

the other, Bomba went to the stream back of the hut and washed his wounds thoroughly. Then he got out a salve that had great soothing and curative qualities and applied it on every place where he had been bitten. This done, he fell rather than lay down, and reclined there utterly exhausted till the break of day.

It was now that his vitality and perfect physical condition stood him in good stead. Had he been less hardy he might have succumbed, owing to his great loss of blood.

Even as it was, it took several days to restore him to his usual condition. His hunting and fishing had to be given up for a time, as he did not dare to venture into the jungle.

As he grew a little stronger, he busied himself in the rebuilding of the ruined portion of the hut.

The hut, in which they had lived for years, was simple in the extreme, though compared to some of the abodes of the half-breeds and the primitive shelters of the Indians, it was almost palatial.

It had been totally enclosed on all four sides, except for the small opening of the doorway, which let in light and air, whereas many of the huts of the caboclos had only roofs for coverings and were open on all four sides to the vicious fury of tropical storms. Those of the natives, deep in the heart of the jungle, were still more simple, consisting usually of cotton hammocks

swung between two trees and a couple of giant palm leaves meeting above for a covering.

There was a wood flooring, laid by Casson years ago, that served to keep out scorpions and the snakes that made their home in the ygapo. It had contained two hammocks, which had been destroyed in the fire, some old boxes with markings on them that had become illegible from time, a chest in which Casson had stored his precious specimens of butterflies and flowers, some scientific books, a few old rusted cooking utensils, and some bits of nicked and broken crockery.

The dress of the inmates of the hut was as primitive as their furniture. Casson wore an old patched pair of trousers and a ragged cotton shirt, which he washed now and then in the river at the back. But Bomba, child of the jungle, preferred the dress of the Indians, the *mundiyeh*, or short tunic of native cloth, with the addition of the puma skin which helped to keep him warm when he was compelled to sleep out at night.

Bomba worked steadily at the reconstruction of the hut, which he was determined to make stronger than it had been before, in order that it might serve as a fort in case they should be attacked by the head-hunters. He used timbers of *lignum vitae*, the toughest and strongest wood of the Amazon jungle. Then he stopped up all the crevices with mud, that under the fierce sun soon

assumed the consistency of stone. He wound everything about with stout bush cord, and completed his work by piling mud and stones against the lower part of all four walls.

And always while he worked Bomba pondered the words that had fallen from Casson's lips when he had heard of the visit of Bomba to the camp of the white men.

"Bartow." "Laura." He repeated them to himself perhaps a thousand times. What did they mean? What bearing, if any, did they have on his own life and destiny?

Several times he was on the point of asking Casson for an explanation. But he remembered the terrible paroxysm into which Casson had been thrown the last time he had uttered those words. Bomba was afraid to precipitate another such scene. It might kill Casson. He loved the old man, clung to him. He would not endanger his life by probing him with any further questions.

In a few days the work on the hut was finished. Bomba was proud of his craftsmanship, and even Casson roused himself from his apathy far enough to bestow some words of praise.

But now that his task was done and his strength fully recovered, a great restlessness took possession of Bomba. Casson, a mere shadow of a man, going for hours without speaking a word,

responding to questions only in monosyllables, was no companion for the lad.

Bomba longed to be off to the shadowy depths of the jungle. He had enemies there, but he also had friends. He would call these friends to him, Kiki and Woowoo, Doto, the giant monkey, and Tatic, head of the monkey tribe.

They were the warmest friends he had in that vast tangled wilderness besides Casson. He understood them, and they loved and trusted him. He was scarcely ever lonesome when with them.

It was very bad to be lonesome. That ache was more terrible to Bomba than any tearing of his flesh. He shrank from it as he did from no physical pain. It was really the poignant longing in him for his own kind, but Bomba knew it only as a strange illness, an ache not of his body but of some mysterious part of him of which he had no knowledge.

So now, feeling this sickness creeping over him, he felt irresistibly the impulse to fly from it, to seek forgetfulness among the only friends he knew.

The jungle boy determined to take his harmonica, too. His eyes brightened at the thought. He had now learned to make the instrument emit the sounds he, Bomba, wished. Perhaps the monkeys and parrots would like it. At least they would be surprised and inquisitive.

Bomba had two good reasons to give Casson for his trip. They needed game. They had been living almost altogether upon the eggs of the jaboties, or forest turtles, and even to a jungle palate, easily satisfied, such a limited diet becomes monotonous, if too long continued. Then, too, he wanted to get in contact with some of the more friendly natives and secure from them a couple of hammocks to replace those that had been destroyed in the fire.

When he announced his intention to Casson, the old man merely nodded in an absent manner and went on with what he was doing. So Bomba took his machete, his bow and arrows, his precious fire stick and his harmonica, and plunged into the jungle, not without repeated injunctions to Casson to be on the alert if the head-hunters should come, and, if he had time, to try to escape down the river.

Bomba had not gone far before he began to see among the trees and in the branches the faces of his wild friends peering at him with their bright eyes.

He called to them softly, and they came to him. Kiki and Woowoo, the parrots, perched on his shoulders and pecked affectionately at his face.

Doto, the great monkey, swung from branch to branch close above his head, now and again

playfully dropping a bunch of leaves upon him. Bomba felt soothed and comforted.

These wild folk loved and trusted him. He was one of them. He belonged here in the heart of the jungle. It must be so.

Yet all the time some mysterious voice within him whispered that it was not so. He did not belong here. He was no caboclo, no Indian. What was he then? Where did he belong?

Bartow! Laura! He felt that in these words must lie the solution of the enigma. Over and over the words ran through his mind, until it seemed that even the chattering monkeys overhead must hear them.

Feeling the loneliness again creeping over him, Bomba sat down on a log and took out his mouth organ. He would gather his friends around him. They would help him to fight off the sickness that came from nowhere and did not hurt his body—hurt only that mysterious part of him that he did not understand.

But the first weird notes on the harmonica had a queer effect upon the jungle denizens. They had begun to cluster about the boy, as they always did when he appeared among them. But at the wail of the curious thing that Bomba held to his mouth they disappeared. If they had suddenly been sucked down to the muddy bottom of the

ygapo, the place could not have seemed more utterly deserted.

Bomba looked surprised for a moment. Then he smiled, his teeth showing dazzling white against his brown skin.

He whistled softly and called:

"Doto! Doto! Where are you?"

There was a slight rustling of leaves in a tree near by, and Doto peered cautiously through the branches. His brow was wrinkled in a scowl that seemed to say he was not at all sure that Bomba was not playing some practical joke on him.

"Look! Nice music! Not hurt Doto!"

Bomba held his mouth organ out to the big monkey, so that he might get a better look at it.

"Nice music," said Bomba again. "Listen!"

Once more he put the harmonica to his lips and blew a plaintive wail into the reaches of the jungle.

A response came that was as startling as it was unexpected.

There was a thunderous roar, a crashing of the undergrowth, and a great jaguar bounded into view!

CHAPTER XIII

PLAYING FOR HIS LIFE

FOR a moment Bomba was so taken aback by the sight of the jaguar that he did not stir.

His harmonica was still between his lips, and the sudden exclamation that was forced from him droned through the mouth organ in a weird, discordant note.

The wailing cry had a strange and instant effect upon the beast. It had crouched as though for a spring, but now it hesitated. It had never seen a human with a gleaming mouth like that. It had never heard that kind of sound. The jungle beast is a creature of habit. Anything new is disconcerting.

Bomba noted instantly the effect, and took advantage of it. He could see that the beast was bewildered and a bit daunted. He wished, if possible, to avoid a physical contest with the huge creature at such close quarters.

So, while his right hand stole slowly to the revolver in his belt, he maintained the harmonica at his mouth with his left and launched into a

refrain that had no melody but which was a mere mass of discordant notes.

The tense attitude of the jaguar relaxed and he settled down on his haunches, his greenish-yellow eyes fastened on Bomba, who in turn stared at him with equal intensity.

The boy was vibrating with excitement, but he let no sign of this appear. Everything depended on his keeping his nerve. The beast was evidently uncertain what to do.

As Bomba played on, there flashed through his mind a story that Casson had told him in a moment of expansion, a story of the snake charmers in a faraway land of which Bomba had forgotten the name. Casson had said that when these men had played on a musical instrument, fierce and poisonous snakes had become as mild and harmless as rabbits and had submitted to be handled without a thought of resistance.

To be sure, a jaguar was not a snake, but might not the same rule apply? He had already seen that he had laid a sort of spell on the creature. How long would it last?

In any event, he had his knife and the revolver as last resorts. And so he kept on playing. He did not know how long he could keep it up; but he was committed to the test. Perhaps he was playing for his life.

One thing he was quick to notice. When he played softly, the jaguar showed evidence of pleasure. Its muscles seemed to relax, and had it not been for the noise he was making Bomba was sure he could have heard it purr.

But when the notes swelled out more sharply the brute moved restlessly and whined. It shook its head, as though to shake the noise from its ears. The strain jarred upon it, hurt it.

Bomba hardly knew how to interpret this. Would the louder notes stir the beast to anger and attack? Or would it create in it such pain and discomfort that it would seek refuge in retreat?

On the mere chance of the latter solution, he abandoned the softer strain altogether and blew with all his might. He was risking everything on a single cast.

The answer was not long in coming. The look that came into the jaguar's eyes was not of rage but of confusion and distress. It scrambled to its feet, looked about uncertainly for a moment, and then turned tail and slunk off into the jungle.

Bomba kept on playing until he was sure that the brute was far away. Then the reaction came on him, and he sank down on the ground, weak and limp and covered with perspiration.

With his immense relief was mingled a new sense of gratitude to the white men. Twice now

their gifts had saved his life. Was there any limit to their magic?

He did not know that the white men themselves would have been astounded at this application of their musical gift. All the jungle lad looked at was the result. It was another link that bound him to the men who seemed in some vague way to bind Bomba's destiny to the race to which he belonged.

He was aroused from his reflections by a squeak from the branches above, and, looking up, he saw the face of Doto, who had disappeared like a flash at the entrance of the jaguar upon the scene and had now ventured back.

With a glint of mischief in his eyes, Bomba blew a few notes on the harmonica. Again Doto darted back, but not with such alarm as before.

When the monkey's face again looked through the branches, Bomba managed to coax him nearer and nearer until at last he dropped from the lowest branch and squatted close to the boy on the ground.

Encouraged by this show of daring on the part of one of their number, the others began to return, peering cautiously at first and from a distance, but coming closer as their curiosity drove them on.

At last, when he had played them all back to him and Woowoo and Kiki were once more

perched trustingly on his shoulders, Bomba passed the mouth organ to Doto.

Doto took it hesitantly, drawing back his hands several times before his long fingers closed firmly on the strange toy. The excited chattering of the monkeys mingled with the raucous notes of the parrots as they flaunted their gorgeous plumage about the boy's head.

Doto regarded the strange instrument with a good deal of concentration. He was not at all sure that he liked it. It took Bomba some time to persuade him to put it to his lips. Then by expelling his breath sharply several times he finally made the monkey understand that he wanted him to blow on it.

One horrible squawk issued from the harmonica. Then Doto dropped it on the ground like a shot and scuttled in panic to the nearest tree.

Some of the more timid among the flock followed him, but most of them remained with Bomba. One young monkey, bolder than the rest, picked up the instrument.

Instantly Doto dropped from the tree, chattering angrily. He boxed the ears of the young monkey soundly and snatched the harmonica from him. He handled the plaything gingerly and held it out to Bomba.

The boy showed his white teeth in an amused

smile and took back the instrument. Doto did not want it, but he was going to make sure that no other monkey got it!

It was good to be here in the jungle with his friends. Bomba would have been glad to stay longer, but there was still much for him to do and he must not leave Casson too long alone.

So reluctantly he said good-bye to them, though they besought him in their way to stay, and set off toward the ygapo.

He had scarcely started when there arose such an excited tumult in the trees that he knew something out of the ordinary had happened or was about to happen.

He seized a low-lying branch and swung himself into a tree.

The screeching and howling increased in volume, and through the foliage of the trees Bomba could see a veritable swarm of monkeys approaching him. They swung from branch to branch in frantic haste, howling with rage and fear.

They were in trouble! They were coming to him for help!

CHAPTER XIV

THE CLOUD OF VULTURES

BOMBA dropped to the ground and waited.

In a moment the monkeys were upon him, dropping from the branches and surrounding him, crowding against him, howling and jabbering all at once.

Bomba drew one red-faced old ape aside. It was the leader of the swarm.

"Tatuc, ba?" asked Bomba, meaning in monkey language, "Tatuc, what is wrong?"

In the jabbering monosyllable chatter, which Bomba from years of intimacy and observation had come to understand sufficiently to get its essential meaning, Tatuc gave the boy the news that his flock had been attacked by a swarm of vultures while trying to defend two of their young that the voracious birds had swooped down upon, with the intention of carrying them off to their retreats, where they could devour them at leisure.

The resistance had infuriated the birds, who were coming in numbers. And the monkeys, timid

folk at best except when they were cornered, had come to Bomba for help.

Even as Bomba gathered this from Tatuc's chattering, a sinister whirring of wings sounded and a cloud of the birds of prey swept down through and under the trees.

Except when attacked or thwarted of their prey, the vultures rarely attack living creatures, preferring to feast in safety and at leisure upon carrion.

But when the latter is scarce, they do not hesitate to swoop down upon lambs or other small game and carry them off. In this instance the young monkeys had been tempting bait, and the attempt of the mothers to defend their offspring had aroused the ferocity of the vultures, never far from the surface, and had prompted this wholesale raid in reprisal.

Against these creatures the monkeys had little defense. They could only fly from them, and quick as they were, the wings of the great birds were swifter.

Now the monkeys crowded close to Bomba, chattering and howling, begging for his protection. He had power. Had they not seen the jaguar slink away from him? Why should he not also disperse the vultures?

As the black pursuing crowd of vultures came closer, Bomba reached for the revolver, balancing

it in his strong brown fingers. The expression of his mouth was grim, but in his heart was already coming the delight of battle.

Again that feeling of power swept over him. In all his contests with bird or beast or reptile of the jungle he had never faced them with such a sense of mastery as now. The revolver, gift of the white men, made all the difference—that deadly little toy from the mouth of which spurted fire and death.

As the ominous cloud swept closer, thickening overhead, Bomba set his sturdy brown legs wide apart and fired into the midst of it.

The friendly monkeys at first were more scared by the report than by the attacking vultures. They shrank away from Bomba, screaming more wildly than before. What had happened? Was their best friend turning against them?

But Bomba shouted to them reassuringly and again shot into the swarm of vultures.

Two of them fell with a great flapping of wings into the underbrush, while a third, one wing drooping, blundered off through the trees.

The attack was halted. Bewildered by the noise of the shots and the spurts of flame, as well as by the fall of some of their number, the great birds fluttered about uncertainly, beating the air with their wings and filling the air with raucous squawks.

The respite, however, was only temporary. The assailants swooped down again, with wicked claws outstretched and cruel curved beaks ready for action.

One of them darted forward and seized a baby monkey, tearing it from the mother's arms. A long agonized howl came from the bereaved female. She sprang into the air and clutched wildly at the tiny helpless bundle in the claws of the vulture.

The great wide-spread wings of the attackers were so close that Bomba was fanned by them. He shielded his eyes instinctively with one arm against the rip of beak and claw. With the other hand he slowly raised the revolver, trained it upon the vulture with the baby monkey in its talons, tightened his finger on the trigger and fired.

The shot struck no vital part, because Bomba had feared to injure the little captive. But he succeeded in breaking the wing of the vulture. With a shrill squeak it dropped its prey, and with its uninjured wing flapping clumsily, disappeared above the trees.

The mother monkey leaped forward, seized her baby, hugged it to her breast and crouched low above it, interposing her body between it and danger.

The vultures returned to the attack with re-

doubled fury. The opposition they encountered served only to enrage them the more. They came in smothering masses, and there ensued a fight that Bomba never forgot.

The monkeys, brought to bay, fought viciously for their lives. But without the aid of Bomba the odds would have been too much for them. And even the boy, armed with his new death-dealing weapon, had need of all his strength and agility to withstand the attack of the predatory birds.

He fought them off as well as he could, wielding his machete with his left hand, shooting when he could, carpeting the ground about him with dead or wounded birds.

But always they came on. There seemed no end of them. His flesh was scratched and torn in a dozen places where powerful wing or beak had raked him.

A hurried glance told him that his friends, the monkeys were suffering horribly. The dead were piled in heaps. Several vultures had seized upon living prey and were making their way toward their home fastnesses.

Raging, Bomba continued to shoot until the cartridges in the weapon were exhausted and the ominous click without a report told him the fire stick needed reloading. He dared not take time for this.

But he still had his bow and arrows and he dropped the revolver and machete and had recourse to those primitive weapons.

Primitive they might be, but in his hands they were deadly. Every time his bow twanged the arrow found its mark. At such close quarters the missile went clear through the body of his target, protruding from the farther side.

It was characteristic of the boy that he never thought of flight. At any moment he could have found refuge in one of the many dense thickets of the vicinity that no bird could penetrate. There he could have waited in perfect security until the fight was over and the raiders had dispersed.

But an ingrained sense of loyalty to his tree-living friends made even the thought impossible. They had come to him. They were fighting against terrible odds. They relied on him to help them. Would he desert them in their extremity, forfeit the confidence they had in him? Not while breath remained in his body.

It seemed as though that breath were not going to remain very much longer. He could scarcely draw air into his bursting lungs. His chest seemed bound with iron bands. His strength was deserting him. He was fairly trembling with fatigue.

But his indomitable will was as strong as ever. He had a wild Berserker rage against these fiendish, ferocious enemies from the air, these pirates of the ether. For every wound he got from beak or talon he was determined to exact a death in return.

But his arrows would soon be gone. Then it would come to a hand-to-hand fight with the machete. But that weapon was only effective when wielded by a strong hand. He might strike with it, wound with it, but in his present wearied state he could not kill. And when it should drop from his paralyzed hand—But Bomba would not allow himself to think of what would happen after that.

Now his last arrow was really gone, and the vultures seemed more numerous than ever. Reinforcements had come to their depleted ranks.

Bomba stooped over and picked up his machete. But to his dismay he found that he could not lift it above his head. His numbed muscles had rebelled at last and refused to obey his will.

Then suddenly, mysteriously, the heavy cloud lifted. Bomba heard the whirring of wings in retreat. He looked up. The vultures had gathered as though in obedience to a signal and were winging their way above the trees.

For a moment the jungle boy did not know what to make of the sudden flight of his enemies.

From his place on the ground he could not know what had startled the vultures.

Then he heard the cries and whimperings of the monkeys.

At the same time Bomba heard the rushing of wind through the jungle. It came with a roar like that of surf pounding upon the shore.

"The great wind!" cried Bomba, and raised his bleeding arms toward the sky.

CHAPTER XV

THE WRATH OF THE STORM

THE great wind, the forerunner of the tropical thunderstorm, had come at the moment of Bomba's greatest need.

All creatures of the jungle fly to shelter before the fury of the storm. Bomba knew this full well, as did all living creatures of these wilds, large and small.

At the first blast of that fierce gale the parakeets flew screaming to shelter. The animals of the forests rushed for their dens and the earth dwellers scurried into their holes.

Even the savage vultures retreated before the onset of the gale and the rain of castanha nuts shaken from the bending trees. Broken wings and broken heads would have resulted from the downfall of those dreaded missiles, heavy enough with their cups to kill a man.

Scarcely had the vultures winged upward in retreat before a second and stronger rush of wind warned Bomba and the group of bleeding and mourning monkeys, in whose behalf he had fought

so stoutly, that the storm was preparing to burst.

Some of the monkeys had lost their young, others their mates. What affected Bomba most was the sight of old Tatuc lying dead on the ground in a pool of blood, his teeth imbedded in the neck of the vulture that he had taken to death with him.

But there was no time for mourning now. Tragedies like these were common in the cruel jungle where the life of one thrived on the death of others. So while a bitter ache shot through Bomba at the loss of Tatuc, his best and oldest friend of the monkey tribe, he dared not linger in the spot.

He gave a sharp word of command to the monkeys, dazed by the loss of their chief, and bade them seek shelter in the upper branches of the trees.

They obeyed slowly, bewilderedly, scarcely seeming to care much what happened to them, leaving their dead behind them on the ground. They would furnish a fine feast for the hungry vultures when they returned to the battlefield, as Bomba knew they would when the storm had passed.

But Bomba could not bear to leave Tatuc there at the mercy of his foes. It revolted him to think that the vultures should have him. He had been unable to save his life, but something

prompted him to one last act of affection for his old friend. So he picked up the body, threw it over his shoulder and as rapidly as he could made his way to a safer place.

It was high time. The trees were bending before the lashing of the wind. The heavy castanhanuts were already beginning to fall with heavy thuds upon the ground. The sky above the waving crests of the trees showed a wierd, leaden gray. The storm was ready to burst.

Bomba had scarcely taken a dozen steps carrying his heavy burden when the tempest broke. The rain came down in a stinging, blinding deluge that scourged him as though with whips. The wind increased to a gale, which, luckily, was at his back. No living thing could have faced it without being swept from its feet.

Bomba was swept along almost without his own volition. Head down, with the dead body of Tatuc held close to his own, he progressed more by the sense of touch than sight, heading toward a deserted native hut that he knew lay at a little distance.

The lightning cut the black of the sky with vicious thrusts. Crash after crash of thunder seemed to shake the very ground beneath the lad's feet. But he reached the hut at last, and, climbing the prostrate deep-notched tree trunk that led to its entrance, slippery now with the rain, he

deposited his lifeless burden on the floor, composed of a few rotting boards.

It was a typical native hut of the jungle. Long ago it had been deserted by its one-time tenants. It consisted of a few upright poles set in the ground, with cross supports to hold them steady. The flooring was made of split pieces of palm trunks, sagging in places.

The walls had been made of the same material, but now only two sides were left standing, the others being open to the assault of wind and weather. A light framework of thinner saplings supported the flimsy roof. This was made of the leaves of the ubussu palm, placed so that they overlapped one another.

Hundreds of creeping insects crawled slimily beneath the roof and now and then dropped upon the shoulders and head of Bomba, as he sat hunched up and brooding beside the body of the dead monkey, Tatuc, leader of the flock.

Once it was a scorpion that fell on the lad, and he was forced to act quickly to kill the creature, before it could inject into his veins the deadly poison of its bite.

For a long time Bomba sat brooding beside his dead companion. The rain swept down in torrents. The lightning crashed and the thunder roared and all nature was in pandemonium.

But the storms of the jungle, fierce while they

last, are seldom of long duration. When at last the rain ceased and the last reverberating peal of thunder died away in the distance, Bomba rose with a sigh and for a few moments left Tatuc alone on the broken flooring of the hut.

Then with the machete and a sharp stick that he found near by, he dug a rude grave for his friend. The ground was soft, and the task did not take long.

This done, Bomba went to the hut, lifted the body of Tatuc, bore it to the long narrow hole in the ground, and placed the remains in it.

The boy stood for several minutes, head bowed, heart heavy, looking mournfully at all that was left of the friend whom he had known and cherished for many years. Bomba had many fond recollections of that friendship. It had supplied in large part what he had lacked in human companionship. How many times a visit to Tatuc had relieved his sore and lonely heart!

"The vultures shall not have you, Tatuc," he said simply.

Then he covered the body with palm leaves and over them put earth. He finished his work by piling up a cairn of heavy stones, so that no marauding beast of the jungle should search out the resting place of his friend.

Then Bomba threw himself face downward near the spot. He lay there for a long time

motionless. He was swept by an intolerable sense of loss.

It seemed to him that he was a mere atom in the world. Who would care whether he lived or died? The white men were gone. He did not believe that he would ever see them again. Tatuc was gone. Casson was left. But Casson had become a mere child again and could not remember, did not want to talk, was wrapped in apathy, as much of a companion as a stone image.

But he had talked once, had almost remembered! Perhaps if Bomba were patient he would remember more one day. Then perhaps Bomba would learn more of what he meant when he had spoken those words that were indelibly engraven upon the boy's memory, "Bartow," "Laura."

Bomba raised himself from the ground and for the last time stood beside the grave of Tatuc.

"Good-bye," he murmured, and then he choked.

Turning and dashing the tears from his eyes, he plunged into the rain-drenched jungle.

Turned, though he knew it not, toward a more grisly peril than he had yet encountered!

CHAPTER XVI

GRIPPED

THE fury of the storm was over, but evidences of it remained.

Castanha nuts lay thick upon the ground. Here a tree had been riven by lightning from top to base. There a forest monarch, uprooted by the gale, lay prostrate.

Again and again Bomba was compelled to make detours. But he advanced rapidly, nevertheless, so much was he a part of the jungle. He avoided upflung roots and intertwining vines as though by instinct.

At times he had to use his machete to force a way for himself through the bushes. In other places, where the undergrowth was not too high, he progressed after the manner of the Indians, in a succession of deer-like leaps that carried him over the obstacles in his path.

His steps now led him toward the ygapo, for it was necessary for him to pass through the swamp before reaching the river beyond which lay the maloca of the Araos, a comparatively

friendly tribe with whom he and Casson had had no differences, although there was never any intimacy between them.

From these he hoped to obtain a pair of cotton hammocks to replace those that had been burned in the fire that had visited the hut. He would gather something on the way to pay for them, perhaps a jaboty or agouti, or possibly some eggs of the forest tortoise, which were always acceptable to natives of the region.

He might, too, learn something about the plans of the head-hunters, if those fierce foes were still in that part of the jungle. Since his first encounter, he had seen no traces of them, although the thought of them was always in the back of his mind.

As Casson had said, the savages were like children, as far as fixity of purpose was concerned. They were ignorant and superstitious, and any unlooked-for incident might be interpreted by them as a sign of the displeasure of their gods at their present expedition and make them return to their home near the Giant Cataract.

But Bomba knew that such good luck was not to be relied on. He knew that at this very moment the band of invaders might be searching the jungle, intent on taking the life of Casson, and that in all likelihood they would try to complete their work by taking his own.

But it was likely that the Araos would know something of the whereabouts of the head-hunters, who were as much a foe of theirs as of the two whites. Bomba thought he might make some kind of a treaty with the more friendly natives to help him and Casson in case of need, or at least to keep him informed by some swift courier of any threatening developments.

Nature was beautiful in the jungle after the storm. The sky above was turquoise and the air, washed clean by rain, was like topaz. The vivid green of the shrubs and the grasses shone like emerald.

The living things had come out from the shelters to which they had been driven by the tempest. Clouds of mazarine-colored butterflies flitted from flower to flower. Humming-birds, green-backed, lily-breasted, with purple throat and crest, darted hither and thither like living gems, with a hundred firelike reflections scintillating from their little bodies.

Then there were the trogons, motmots and kingfishers glowing with iridescent hues, flocks of scarlet macaws, flamingoes almost equally gorgeous, each standing on one long slender leg and basking in the sun; herons, plover, toucans and scores of other curious birds that make the Amazon jungle the most wonderful natural aviary on earth.

Bomba had the soul of a poet, and the beauty of it all sank deep. For a time he almost forgot his errand, so entranced was he by the glories spread so lavishly about him. He paused to look about in delight mingled with wonder that such loveliness could exist.

Not only the living things, but the plants and trees and flowers had their appeal to him. There was the giant mora tree, two hundred feet high, aglow with clusters of scarlet blossoms, feathery palms, the bright yellow trumpet flower with blooms so large that they were worn as hats by the Indian women and children, huge fuchsias with their purplish tubular bells, heliotrope, verbenas, orchids, glowing with all the colors of the rainbow.

The whole region was ablaze with beauty beyond the power of an artist to paint or the imagination of a dreamer to conceive.

As Bomba approached the edge of the ygapo, however, the beauty began to fade, and nature assumed a more sombre aspect. The riot of color died on the borders of the swamp, and its place was taken by drabness and desolation.

With a feeling of sick distaste Bomba left the region that had almost made him lose himself in dreams and began to thread the mazes of the swamp.

Part of it was intersected with deep pools, in

which he had to wade, sometimes to the waist. Other sections were comparatively free from water, but deep in mud.

But Bomba knew the swamp as he knew the jungle, knew how to keep a reasonably straight course through the pathless waste and how to avoid the deeper and more dangerous parts.

He had gone about halfway across the dismal place when he came upon a sight that chilled the blood in his veins. Used as he was to the presence of all sorts of reptiles in the jungle, and especially in the ygapo, he was filled with a sensation of loathing and disgust as he viewed the scene before him.

In a shallow, muddy pool, about thirty feet in front of him, he saw a mass of writhing snakes, gray in color like the mud in which they wallowed.

"Sucurujus!" muttered Bomba, as he saw that the group embraced scores of the dreaded anacondas of the Amazon.

They were of all sizes, some of them six or seven feet in length, others three times as long.

They seemed at first to take no notice of Bomba. Most of them were sleeping, some with their bodies half-submerged beneath the lukewarm, shallow ooze. Others had crawled upon the bodies of their comrades, while still others lay lazily on the borders of the pool, basking in the sun.

Lucky for him, thought Bomba, that he had not been crossing the ygapo after the setting of the sun had bathed the swamp in darkness. To have stepped into that crawling mass would have meant certain and horrible death.

Bomba hated the anaconda more than he did any other denizen of the jungle. That hate dated back to the time he had been attacked by one of the reptiles and Casson had fired the rifle, which, though it frightened away the anaconda, had had such dire results to poor Casson himself.

His hand fell on the butt of his revolver, which he had taken care to load again while he was in the little native hut, after he had buried Tatic. It was a tempting target that offered itself to him.

A few shots into that writhing mass would take a terrible toll. In a sense, it would take revenge for Casson's injury. His finger itched to pull the trigger.

But he restrained himself. It would be well to let well enough alone. They were lazy and somnolent, scarcely aware of his presence. Why provoke a conflict which he might avoid?

Besides, cartridges were precious, and he must conserve them.

So, with a sigh, he restrained the impulse and, edging his way to the right, he made a wide circle about the nest of snakes, watching the

ground carefully, lest one of the monsters should cross his path.

But it was from above that danger came.

A dark, sinister, rope-like body slithered silently from a tree above Bomba's head.

The next instant what seemed a band of iron tightened about the boy's chest!

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE FOLDS OF A BOA CONSTRICTOR

A THRILL of terror ran through Bomba.

He knew in an instant what had happened. A great boa, lying in wait for whatever living thing might pass beneath the tree, had darted down upon him. The coils of the great snake were tightening upon him inexorably.

For a moment he gave himself up for lost. And lost he inevitably would have been, had the snake retained the grip of its tail upon the bough. This it was that gave it the purchase required for squeezing its prey to death.

But the bough was slippery from the recent rain, and the fury of the reptile's sudden dart tore the tail loose from the point of support.

The great body fell with a thud. The coils did not relax. But on the other hand they could not tighten until the snake, lashing wildly about, could find some stump or tree to encircle with its tail and use it as a lever.

Bomba felt as though his lungs were bursting, his ribs cracking. He expected every second to be crushed into a shapeless mass.

The snake had wound about his body, but the boy's arms remained free. Desperately he felt for his machete. He drew it forth from its sheath with his right hand and slashed furiously at the enfolding coils.

For a moment the iron bands seemed to press all the closer. The infuriated reptile raised its horrid head and struck at the boy's neck. Bomba dodged, and the fangs buried themselves in his shoulder.

Again and again Bomba lashed out frantically with his knife. Each time the weapon found its mark. Bomba could feel that the coils were relaxing slightly.

Once more the terrible head was raised high in the air for another blow. And at that instant a lucky slash went deep and severed the spinal cord.

The threatened blow never descended. The head wavered and fell. Bomba grasped it with his left hand and, summoning all his strength, struck the reptile in the throat, completely severing the head from the body. The coils unwound and fell in a heap at the boy's feet.

Bomba threw the head from him with a sharp exclamation of disgust, mingled with relief, and stepped quickly to one side to escape the flailing of the writhing, twisting body of the headless boa constrictor.

He had been close to death. Only the slipping of the snake's tail from the slippery bough had saved him. His brave heart alone would not have availed.

With a shudder of repulsion he examined his foe, after the thrashing had subsided and the great snake lay quiet.

Bomba had seen much larger snakes, but this was quite large enough, the boy reflected, as he rubbed his chest, bruised and sore from the pressure of the folds. The reptile was about twelve feet long and as thick as Bomba's leg.

The horrible head, lying a little distance from the body, still gaped at him, though the malignant glitter of the eyes had been glazed by death. Bomba shuddered as he thought how nearly those awful fangs had been imbedded in his throat. But they had sunk into his shoulder.

Now, as well as he could, he examined the wound. It was causing him severe pain, but no apprehension. He knew that the boa constrictor carried no poison in its jaws. Its terrible crushing power was its main reliance. His shoulder would be sore for a few days, and that was all. He cleansed the wound with water from a pool, and then wiped his bloody hunting knife on a wad of leaves.

"You did well," he said aloud, addressing his trusty weapon as he thrust it back into his girdle

of cloth. "You have served Bomba many times, but never better than this."

Once more he went on his way, but, warned by his adventure, his eyes scanned the trees above him as carefully as they did the ground before him.

Before long he had passed through the dreary ygapo and heard in the distance the musical tinkle of a waterfall. It was a sound that made his heart leap with pleasure. Again and again he had viewed the fall, entranced, as the spray-crested torrent dashed over the lip of the cliff into the whirling vortex of water beneath that formed the first of the series of great rapids rushing onward to the river.

Bomba loved the waterfall. It spoke to him in a vague and mystic way of forces unchained. As he came now in full sight of it, there was something in the power and wild beauty of the rushing waters that struck an answering chord in his soul, causing his blood to run more swiftly and making his eyes kindle with delight.

What made him feel that way? Bomba brooded over this, as he brooded over many of the strange thoughts and emotions that puzzled him.

He wondered if the caboclos felt as he did about this magnificent cascade. He remembered that he had seen one of them come out from the

jungle and stand for a moment above the rushing waters, looking down upon them.

There had been no change in the expression of the caboclo. He had not seemed to be drinking in the beauty of it all. If the man had loved the waterfall as Bomba did, his face would have lighted up and his eyes would have laughed, as Bomba had seen his own laugh one day when he had suddenly seen his face reflected in the pellucid waters of a lovely pool.

Bomba had not known himself then. He had started back from the image in the pool as though from some mysterious thing hiding beneath the surface of the water. But when, gaining courage, he had again peered over the rim, his face looked back at him, and he knew it was his own.

But the face now was puzzled and solemn. It had lost the first laughing look, the look of some one on whom a radiant vision has burst. He tried again to laugh, but it was not the same. The laughter was forced. What a strange changing mixture of emotions he possessed! He was something, then, besides form and features. There was more in him than he could touch and see. Could it be perhaps because he had something that the white men had called a soul? What was this soul?

Many, many lonely hours Bomba had spent wondering about this.

Why did he never see that look upon the face of Casson? Why did the faces of the natives always wear to Bomba the same dull and stupid look, as dull and stupid, Bomba thought, and often more so, than the faces of his jungle friends? Why were the faces of the Indians always the same, except when they darkened and grew fierce and stern? Why did beauty not appeal to them as it did to him?

Bomba felt sure that the native tribes who lived within sight and sound of the great cascade, who could feast their eyes on it whenever they would, did not love it as he did. They thought of it only as the abode of spirits, some good, most of them bad, and believed that the evil spirits walked at night. During the dark hours they remained close within the circle of the maloca, where the night fires burned bright.

Bomba did not believe that evil spirits dwelt in the waterfall. It was beautiful, and to Bomba beautiful things were good.

Why did they feel so differently from him? Was it because they did not have souls? He dismissed this thought as improbable. But perhaps their souls were asleep. Ah, that must be it! They were asleep!

But his was awake. At least it was waking. Perhaps that was because he was white. The thought gave him a thrill. Now he was sure

that he had found the truth. The natives' souls were asleep. The white men's souls were awake. And he was white!

He had been so absorbed in his broodings that he had become almost oblivious of the passage of time. A glance at the sun startled him. He must hurry.

With a last lingering look at the beautiful cascade and a mental resolve to return to it soon, he struck off at a tangent into the jungle, gliding along silently and swiftly, eager to make up for the time he had spent in dreaming.

He reproached himself for having lingered. Why had he forgotten for the moment Casson, poor old helpless Casson, left alone in the hut, an easy prey to the stealthy head-hunters if they should succeed in ferreting out his location.

He was hurrying along when he suddenly stopped short.

In his path were the freshly made tracks of a jaguar!

CHAPTER XVIII

AT THE WATER HOLE

BOMBA's hand went swiftly to his revolver as his keen eyes swept the surrounding jungle.

Nothing ominous met his straining sight. There was no sign of the dreaded monarch of the forest.

This, however, was but little reassuring. Bomba knew the stealth of the cruel beast, as subtle as it was ferocious. Its tawny hide was little discernible from the grasses and shrubs of the jungle.

Perhaps at this very moment its greenish-yellow eyes were fastened upon him from the shelter of some thicket. Possibly it was crouching on a branch of one of the overhanging trees, its body flattened so close to the bough that it seemed a part of the tree itself.

But it was best not to stand waiting too long. He was as much in danger there as though he were speeding through the jungle. Death might pounce on him at any time. But he was glad of the warning.

With his revolver held ready for instant use, Bomba started again through the forest, his keen eyes searching every tuft of underbrush and scanning the branches of every tree under which he passed.

Only after half an hour had passed without incident did his tense nerves relax, though he abated not a jot of his vigilance.

The jaguar had passed that way but a little while before, but had probably not been aware of the boy's close proximity.

Bomba was thankful that not all the animals of the jungle were his enemies. He had repeated proofs of this as he moved swiftly along.

Monkeys followed his course through the branches of the trees, chattering at him and playfully throwing handfuls of leaves and small nuts down on his head.

The parrots shrieked and screamed at him, and once one of them dropped on his shoulders, accompanying him on this moving perch a considerable distance through the woods.

A little later Bomba came across a jaboty, or forest turtle. He pounced upon it eagerly, and trussing it up with bush cord, swung it, still alive, across his shoulders. If he could also get an agouti or a capivara, he would have something to give the Araos when he should come upon their maloca. He would not come empty-handed.

He would have delicacies that they prized, and they would be ready to listen favorably to his request for the hammocks in exchange.

For a long time he had been conscious of a growing thirst. The heat and his exertions, together with the exciting events to which he had been a party, had parched his throat and lips. His tongue felt swollen.

He looked around in the hope that he might find a cactus. This he could slit with his machete and secure as much as he wanted of the cooling delicious waters that these plants store up, a fact that, if known, would have saved the lives of many of those who have perished of thirst in the very shadow of the thorny plants.

But there was no cactus in the immediate vicinity, and this denial of his need only served to make his thirst more intense.

He knew that at a little distance from the line he was traversing there was a water hole, fed by subterranean springs that never ran dry. More than once he had slaked his thirst at this.

He turned now and headed in that direction. He was parched with a terrible thirst that only dwellers in the jungle or the desert can know.

He had left the trail to take a short cut to the water hole, for he knew the regular trail used by the jungle beasts was still some distance ahead.

Suddenly he paused, his machete with which

he had been hewing his way, raised. He held himself rigidly motionless. What was that he had heard?

It was the slithering of a snake through the underbrush, but a snake that, disturbed, was gliding away from the intruding boy.

He was fast nearing the water hole. He quickened his steps, licking his dry lips with his parched tongue. A few minutes more and his eyes would be gladdened by the sight of the pool, its mirror-like surface reflecting back the heavy foliage and the waving crest of palms that grew close at its edge. What great draughts of that cooling water he would drink! How he would revel in its plenty!

But even the terrible thirst that tormented Bomba could not rob him of his caution. He knew that the creatures of the jungle resorted there. So with extreme care he advanced toward the fringe of trees that still hid the water hole from view.

Silently he parted the bushes and looked through.

What he saw there caused him to grind his teeth with rage. A deep growl formed in his arid throat. For that moment Bomba was all primitive.

He was thirsty but he could not drink. Others had reached the pool before him.

Three pumas, the panthers of the Amazon, had gathered at the water's edge and were drinking contentedly.

Again the growl in Bomba's throat. He raised his revolver in an impulsive gesture, but quickly lowered it. Caution told him it was wiser not to enrage such powerful foes. They were three to one. Bomba still desired to live.

There was a movement behind him.

Bomba turned swiftly about, every muscle tense to meet an attack from the newcomer!

CHAPTER XIX

A BATTLE ROYAL

THERE came the padding of feet and a pushing aside of the bushes, and Bomba could see the outlines of a great body of some member of the four-footed tribe advancing toward him.

Some other denizen of the jungle coming to refresh himself at the water hole. Bomba's pulses beat fast. There were enemies now behind him as well as in front of him. They had come to enjoy a drink. They might stay to enjoy a feast, with Bomba furnishing the material for the banquet. It was a gruesome prospect, and Bomba could feel the chills creeping over him.

He gripped his weapon tightly, prepared to sell his life dearly, though he knew that against such odds he had no chance of escape.

The bushes parted and a great head looked through.

Bomba raised his weapon, but he dropped it again when he saw that head more distinctly. At the same moment the newcomer raised his paw in a gesture that Bomba knew.

The boy thrust his revolver in his belt and bounded toward the great puma.

"Polulu!" Bomba cried, and clapped the great beast upon the flank, as a civilized boy might have fondled a pet dog. "You have come in time. You will get me my drink. Look!"

The puma rubbed his head against the boy, and they went together toward the fringe of trees.

When Polulu saw the other pumas at the pool his eyes gleamed viciously, his tail swished the bushes, and a growl started rumbling in his throat.

For gentle as Polulu was with the boy who had saved him when trapped by the tree, he was fierceness itself as far as his fellows were concerned. Because of this and his gigantic size and strength, he was respected and feared by all the other beasts of the jungle. He brooked no opposition, and swept every one who dared to dispute his rule remorselessly out of the way.

He had gathered that Bomba was thirsty but was afraid to go near the pool because of the foes that clustered there. Very well, Polulu would see to that! His friend should have his drink!

Bomba watched his companion with breathless interest and curiosity, as Polulu stalked majes-

tically through the heavy brush and approached the other pumas on the edge of the pool.

They had stopped drinking, but still lingered in the pleasant spot. It was plain by their attitudes as they lounged among the soft wet ferns at the water's edge that they were in no hurry to depart.

Polulu came steadily down toward them. As he approached, the other pumas sprang to their feet and gathered together at one side of the pool, as though to combine against a common enemy. Battle was in the air.

When he had almost reached them, Polulu stopped and growled warningly.

Three growls answered him, and Polulu knew that, confident in their numbers, they were accepting the challenge. They were defying his authority, a thing that none of them would have dared do if alone.

Jungle bred as Bomba was and used to fighting for his right to live, a momentary doubt entered his heart as to whether he ought to ask Polulu, his friend Polulu, to give battle against such odds in a quarrel not his own.

But such thoughts were idle. In the jungle, if one lived at all, one must not question but must act. Moreover, the puma was filled now with the excitement and joy of battle and could not be

stopped before victory or defeat had come to him.

Polulu started forward, his big head swinging from side to side, yellow eyes gleaming, lips drawn back wickedly from his fangs.

Before him the other beasts gave ground slowly, grudgingly, growling with increasing irritation as they were crowded back toward the jungle.

They were not really angry yet. Polulu's strange conduct bewildered them. They did not know his object. Ordinarily the beasts shared the water hole without dispute, their fighting instincts subdued for the time by the gratification of a common need.

But now they were growing fierce from this summary eviction. When Polulu would have driven them still further back, so as to give Bomba free access to the water hole, their growls grew more menacing and their bodies crouched closer to the ground.

But they had been crowded a considerable distance away from the pool, and Polulu turned and looked at Bomba as though to assure him that the way was clear.

Bomba would gladly have waited until the trio of enemies were fairly out of sight. But he knew now that Polulu would feel hurt and bewildered if he did not come. It would make the brute seem

foolish. Had he not driven off Bomba's enemies? Was he not now standing guard? Did Bomba distrust his power?

The boy no longer hesitated.

Swiftly, with great deer-like leaps, he covered the distance to the edge of the water hole.

So sudden was the action that the great cats, their eyes fastened on the least movement of Polulu, were taken completely by surprise.

Bomba flung himself on the ground and had drunk great draughts of the clear cold water before they fairly grasped the situation.

Here was a new enemy. An enemy easier to fight than Polulu. Their hair began to bristle and they commenced to creep forward, their bodies, still close to the ground, moving almost as sinuously as so many snakes.

Polulu roared fiercely and struck at the nearest puma, raking him with his sharp claws from shoulder to thigh.

With a horrible scream of rage and pain, the wounded puma sprang at Polulu. But the old puma was quicker than the young one. His powerful jaws clamped about the throat of his adversary and worked savagely. No amount of thrashing about or raking with claws could shake off that grip.

The other pumas, temporarily daunted by the

terrible punishment that Polulu was inflicting, began to creep toward Bomba.

The lad raised his revolver and pressed the trigger. The bullet sped straight and true, pierced the eye of the nearest puma and penetrated to the brain.

The stricken beast leaped into the air and then fell sprawling upon the ground.

The report seemed to madden the remaining brute. With a howl of fury it sprang at Bomba.

Quick as a flash, the boy dodged, missing by a fraction of an inch the impact of that heavy body and the death-dealing blow of the terrible paw.

As Bomba leaped, his foot caught under a root, and he almost fell. In his struggle to regain his balance, the revolver fell from his hand.

The puma had turned and crouched for another spring. Bomba had no time to stoop and recover his weapon. The boy gave himself up for lost.

But even as the puma launched itself in its spring, a great body shot across Bomba's vision and met the assailant in mid-air.

It was Polulu who had finished his first opponent and now came to the rescue of his friend.

Teeth tearing, claws going like piston rods, the ferocious brutes fell to the ground and rolled

over and over, growling, spitting, biting, each trying to get a strangle-hold on the other's throat. No quarter was to be given in that desperate fight. It was to be a battle to the death.

Bomba, gladdened by his sudden deliverance when all hope had seemed lost, stepped back out of reach of the combatants. He felt for his revolver and found it.

Bomba could see now that Polulu, wearied from his first victorious battle, was at a disadvantage against the fresh young puma. The boy circled about the duelists, seeking for an opportunity to help the friend who had so loyally helped him.

The chance came sooner than he had expected.

The young puma sprawled across the back of Polulu. His fangs sank into the old veteran's neck, his teeth seeking the spinal cord. Polulu rolled over in a desperate attempt to dislodge his enemy. The movement brought the young puma's head directly within the range of Bomba's revolver.

Bomba did not hesitate. He fired instantly. The shot struck the puma in the center of the forehead.

It did not kill him, but it stunned him and made him relinquish his grip.

The next instant a second bullet penetrated to

the brain. The brute struggled convulsively for a moment, then straightened out and lay still.

Bomba went over to Polulu. The old puma was exhausted and bleeding from a dozen wounds.

Bomba put his arm about the neck of his friend, and Polulu rubbed his head against the boy and tried to lick his face.

"Polulu!" exclaimed Bomba, as he caressed the great head, "you are brave. You are strong. You are the best of all the beasts of the jungle."

Polulu purred complacently, as though to say he knew it.

CHAPTER XX

AN UNEXPECTED RECEPTION

THE puma and the boy rested for a time, while Polulu licked his wounds, and when Bomba went on again the puma accompanied him for some distance through the jungle.

It was getting late, and Bomba began to wonder whether he would be able to visit the village of the Araos and return on the same day.

He could spend the night in the jungle, of course. He had done it many times before and had not been afraid. Now, especially with Polulu to guard him, he would be safe enough.

But Casson! There was always Casson. At any time now he might be made the victim of an attack by the fierce head-hunters of Nascanora. And when that time came, if it should come, Bomba wanted to be at the old man's side to live or die with him as fate might determine.

He pushed on as fast as he could, the faithful Polulu still beside him, the jaboty slung over his shoulder. He was getting close to the maloca now, and if there was any chance of accomplish-

ing his errand and getting back before midnight, he meant to take advantage of it.

Still faster he went, Polulu padding beside him and keeping away by his presence not only jungle enemies but Bomba's friends, the monkeys and the parrots, who gave him a wide berth when they saw the grim guardian that kept pace with him.

When they drew near to the place where Bomba expected to find the tribe he was searching for, the boy said good-bye to Polulu, telling him that if the Indians saw him coming accompanied by a puma they would consider his visit an unfriendly one.

Whether Polulu clearly understood this or not, he knew that he had received his dismissal, and with a last friendly rub of his tawny head he disappeared into the jungle. But Bomba had a feeling that he was hovering somewhere near, ready at the slightest need to come again to his help.

Bomba began to be troubled now because he had no more to take as a present to the Araos than the jaboty. He had had so much to do in preserving his life through the course of the momentous day that he had had but little time to look for game.

Once he thought that fortune was going to favor him. It was when he caught sight of a

tapir close to the edge of a small stream. But the tapir had seen him first and disappeared like a shadow in the depths of the jungle before Bomba could bring his weapon into play.

He was greatly disappointed at this. Some tapir meat would have been a succulent present to bring to the Araos. Laden with such a gift, he could hardly have failed to be received with gratitude and friendship.

However, he had no more time to hunt. He at least had the jaboty, and he could promise to bring the natives more game at some future time if they would let him have the hammocks he needed.

The sound of a drum rang through the jungle. Bomba halted, head up, every sense alert.

He was hard upon some Indian maloca, that was certain. The medicine man of the tribe was beating the drum to propitiate the particular god worshipped by his people.

Was it the village of the Araos he was approaching? It should be, by his reckoning of time and distance. Yet it was by no means certain, for these tribes shifted their locations frequently as they followed the game trails or searched for better fishing places.

Even if it were some other tribe, however, Bomba had no reason, he thought, to fear their active unfriendliness. The head-hunters were the

only real enemies that he was conscious of having in the jungle.

He went on, therefore, trying to stifle some vague premonition that was stirring within him. He had a feeling, an instinct, that something unpropitious was in the air.

Soon the increasing signs of human habitation warned him that he was in close proximity to a village.

In accordance with Indian etiquette, which resents a sudden intrusion, he clapped his hands and shouted.

The echo of the shout died away in the forest. There was no answering call.

Bomba waited stoically, betraying no outward sign of uneasiness. After a few moments he shouted more loudly than before.

Still there was no answer, and he began to be seriously perturbed.

If the Indians had been in a friendly mood, they would already have sent out a scout to see who the visitor was, what he wanted, and welcome him to the maloca.

A third time Bomba shouted. Still no answer. All the previous sounds of life and activity he had noted had been hushed, and above everything hung the silence of the grave.

And now Bomba had the impression that the jungle was filled with shadowy, furtive forms.

He felt that each tree and thicket might be hiding an enemy, ready the next instant to make the intruder a target for his arrow.

Still the lad remained quietly where he was, not moving a muscle and showing no signs of alarm.

There was a slight rustle immediately behind him, and Bomba turned quickly.

There, where the instant before had been nothing, stood a dark-skinned Indian, magnificent in his six-feet-two of brawn and muscle.

The face of the Indian bore no welcoming smile. On it was a scowl so black that Bomba's heart sank within him!

CHAPTER XXI

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

IN a moment's time Bomba had taken a grip on himself.

He returned the scowl of the Indian with a flashing smile that showed all his white teeth, and, beating with his two clenched hands upon his bronzed chest, cried in a loud voice that held no sign of quavering:

"Karo Katu Kama-rah!" thus declaring himself "Good white friend!"

Without any relaxing of his scowl, the Indian grunted "Ugh" and pointed to the jaboty slung over Bomba's shoulder.

The boy took the still living turtle by the bush cord with which it was tied and held it out to the Indian.

The latter received it with another grunt, and, beckoning Bomba to follow, threaded his way through the bushes to the maloca.

Bomba followed, knowing by a sixth sense that he was himself being followed and spied upon. He could feel eyes boring into his back. Yet not

once did he catch sight of a dark-skinned form, nor did the cracking of a single twig beneath a brown foot betray the presence of anyone but himself and his Indian guide in all the silent jungle.

In a few minutes they reached the maloca.

It was only a small Indian village, with perhaps thirty primitive dwellings arranged in circular fashion about a small clearing.

The "huts" were of the simplest sort. Some were merely hammocks, swung between two poles. Palm leaves formed the roof of these rude abodes, wholly insufficient to shelter their owners from the mildest of tropical storms.

But the dwelling of the chief was more elaborate. This was more like the cabin that Bomba shared with Casson, except that only two sides of it were enclosed.

The chief met him in the center of the clearing, surrounded by some dozen stalwart young warriors. The chief himself was an old man, wizened and toothless, with an inscrutable expression in the small eyes he turned upon Bomba.

The latter looked around on the ring of faces. There was nothing encouraging in them. All bore scowls similar to that of the scout who had led him to the maloca.

Bomba stood motionless, the target of all these unfriendly eyes, while the man who had first met

him advanced toward the chief and laid the jaboty at his feet.

There followed a brief harangue in the Indian tongue that was carried on in so low a tone that Bomba could not hear what was said.

Then the chief motioned to him to come forward. Bomba obeyed, his face a perfect mask for the tumult of emotions that was surging within him.

The harangue had evidently not helped his cause. The faces were, if possible, still more unfriendly, and there were mutterings that portended an approaching storm.

Could it be that this tribe had made some sort of treaty with the head-hunters and had joined with them in the attempt to kill the two whites?

This was possible, Bomba thought, but hardly likely. There was a deadly antipathy between the two tribes, and the head-hunters probably planned to make the Araos their victims as soon as they had made an end of Casson and himself.

It was much more probable, Bomba thought, that the visit of the head-hunters to that district had been laid by the Araos at the door of Casson. It might have brought to a head all the superstitious feelings they themselves had entertained in regard to the old naturalist. Perhaps he was a Man of Evil, as the head-hunters declared. If so, he ought to be put out of the way. At any

rate, if he were killed, perhaps the head-hunters would go back to the Giant Cataract and trouble the Araos no more.

In this conjecture Bomba was right. The tribe was sorely troubled by the incursion of their dreaded enemies. At any time they might be attacked and wiped out. If the whites had not been in that district, the head-hunters would not have come.

So, on the innocent heads of Casson and Bomba they were prepared to vent the irritation caused by this invasion. And here was one of the trouble-makers who had walked right into their hands. What better opportunity to get him, at least, out of the way? Casson could be dealt with later.

So Bomba's instinct had not played him false when it had warned him that he was in danger. He read doom on the faces of all that scowling group.

He knew that to try now to escape would be useless. A quick glance over his shoulder told him that all escape was cut off from the rear. A score or more of Indians had magically appeared to swell the group, no doubt those who had been following and spying upon him in the jungle.

The women and children of the tribe had gathered at one end of the maloca, and were looking on stoically at the scene.

As Bomba reached the circle of Indians about

the chief a dozen sinewy hands reached out to grasp him. In a moment more he would be helpless, a prisoner where he had expected to be a guest. And none knew better than Bomba what it meant to be a prisoner of the Indians.

But before one of the reaching hands could close upon him there came a shrill cry from among the group of squaws and maidens.

While all turned in surprise at this unexpected interruption, a small girl, not more than six or seven years old, detached herself from the group and rushed toward Bomba.

While the lad stood amazed and unable to move, the little thing took his hand in her own and turned to face the chief.

"Kama-rah!" she exclaimed impetuously. "Kari Katu Kama-rah!" and touched the white boy on the chest.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TURN OF THE WHEEL

A BABBLE of excited exclamations broke out at this sudden intervention of the girl in Bomba's behalf.

"Pirah!" said the chief, in a voice where sternness was mingled with affection. "Da-rah!"

But Pirah showed no intention of going away. She stamped her foot and clung the more tightly to Bomba's hand.

The boy recognized her then as the youngest child of the chief, Hondura. He had seen her more than once when he had skirted the village in some of his hunting excursions.

Although the women of the jungle are as a rule even more stolid than the men, Pirah promised to be an exception to the rule.

She it was who liked to play at hunting, shouldering a bow as big as herself and learning to shoot at a target when her baby hands could barely stretch the strings.

Her fire and spirit and playful antics had amused the old chief, who scarcely checked her in

anything, and the little Pirah had gradually grown into the spoiled and petted darling of the tribe.

But now, when she espoused the cause of Bomba, who had come perhaps to put the tribe under the spell of Casson, the Man of Evil, the thing was too serious to be laughed at, even by the doting father.

There were dark looks on the faces of the younger warriors, and hands were again outstretched to seize Bomba.

But the eyes of the little maiden flashed and she pushed the nearest Indian away with her tiny hand.

"Kama-rah!" she cried again, appealing to her father.

But Hondura scowled, and his black face so frightened Pirah that she shrank back against Bomba.

"Da-rah!" again commanded her father, and this time the child obeyed and went back weeping to the group of women.

With his little defender gone, strong hands gripped Bomba and drew him within the ring of savages.

Bomba felt that this was the end.

But again there came an interruption. Peto, the shaman, or medicine man, of the tribe, came up to Bomba in a slow dreamy way, eyes closed, as though he were walking in his sleep.

The braves fell back before this man of mystery.

Peto took hold of Bomba and began to feel all over him, his face, his hands, his chest, his legs.

Then Peto went into a violent spasm, twitching and trembling, showing the whites of his eyes and foaming at the mouth.

Bomba had stood the hauling and mauling without protest, though without much hope of any good coming from it.

The old medicine man broke out into a babble of words, sometimes almost beneath his breath, again rising to a shrill scream.

The Indians watched him breathlessly, though they sought to repress any show of emotion.

Peto continued to open and shut his eyes rapidly, while the muscles of his face twitched convulsively. At times he would reach out and pinch Bomba's legs until the lad winced.

Finally, when Bomba had begun to feel that he could not stand the strain much longer, the shaman opened his eyes, looked straight at the lad, and cried at the top of his cracked voice:

"Kari Katu Kama-rah!"

The words had a magical effect upon the Indians. The scowls disappeared instantly from their faces and they echoed in chorus:

"Kari Katu Kama-rah!"

Bomba was saved. Peto had declared that the

jungle boy was a friend, and Hondura and his braves were willing to accept the medicine man's word.

The chief motioned Bomba to him, and the boy squatted beside him on the ground. The men of the tribe gathered around, as friendly now as they had been antagonistic before. Gone was their warlike attitude. The change was kaleidoscopic.

It had been a matter of touch and go. Bomba marveled at his good fortune in winning Peto's approval. Apart from saving his life for the present, it would have other consequences. It was no light matter to have the Araos on his side, in view of the presence of the head-hunters on their deadly mission.

While the chief was questioning Bomba, the little maiden Pirah lingered wistfully on the outside of the group.

After a while Hondura called her to him. The little one came timidly and sat down beside Bomba and again took his hand in hers.

Bomba smiled down at her and Pirah smiled back. There were so few smiles ever bestowed on the lonely boy that it warmed his heart.

The chief seemed pleased, and looked at Bomba with a more friendly expression than before.

To Bomba's inquiries about Nascanora and his

people Hondura replied that the chief of the head-hunters had visited him and professed friendship with the Araos. Hondura knew, though, that Nascanora's heart was black and that the invaders were only trying to lull him into security until they were ready to fall on his people and wipe them out. But he was watchful and his braves were ready.

"Did Nascanora say anything about Casson?" Bomba asked anxiously.

"Yes. Nascanora wanted one of my Araos to go with him as guide to point out the location of Casson's hut. But I, Hondura, professed ignorance and Nascanora frowned. But finally he went away with words of friendship."

Hondura admitted that he, too, had thought that Casson might be a Man of Evil, as Nascanora had said. But now that Peto had spoken, he knew that Casson and Bomba were good. So he, Hondura, would do nothing to aid Nascanora in his designs against the whites.

This was balm to Bomba's anxious soul. The chief object of his mission had been accomplished. Casson would be glad.

The matter of the hammocks was simple. Hondura would have given him half a dozen if Bomba had wanted them. But the boy accepted only the two, and these were brought at the

command of the chief and tied up in a light bundle.

It required considerable diplomacy for Bomba to terminate his visit quickly without offense. They were for having him stay with them for that night, several nights if he would. But Bomba managed to impress them with the necessity of his getting back to Casson at once, and they reluctantly yielded.

The chief had noticed that Bomba's arrows were all gone, and as a parting proof of friendship insisted on supplying him with a dozen choice ones from his own stock.

Thanking him warmly and promising to return again within a short time bringing gifts, Bomba took leave of Hondura and little Pirah, who clung to him up to the last moment.

Several of the younger warriors, as a mark of courtesy, accompanied him some distance into the jungle, and when they finally left him repeated the words of Peto, "Kari Katu Kama-rah!"

Bomba responded earnestly and with a grateful heart, and when they disappeared like ghosts in the shadows he was conscious of a still deeper sense of the loneliness that of late had become his constant companion.

The jungle seemed to him unnaturally still. The screaming of the parrots was less strident

than usual and the chattering of the monkeys sounded muffled and far away.

His eyes fell on the track of a tapir, and this roused him from his musings. He followed it for a short distance, and came upon his quarry so suddenly that he almost betrayed his presence. But the wind was blowing toward him, and he had made no sound.

The tapir was standing with his side toward him, offering as good a target as any hunter could wish.

Bomba fitted one of Hondura's arrows to his bow and let fly.

The missile sped swift and true. It struck the tapir at the base of the skull, and the animal toppled over and died with scarcely a struggle.

Bomba covered the distance between him and his prey in a few leaps.

Good luck, thought Bomba. He would have something good to take back to the hut. It would be good to have meat again, after living so long on the eggs of the jaboty.

He cut choice steaks from the carcass with his machete. These he wrapped in leaves, bound with bush cord and slung with the hammocks over his shoulder.

Bomba was jubilant. The day was ending in accordance with his fondest hopes. He had gained the friendship of the Araos and put an

obstacle in the way of Nascanora. He had with him hammocks, the comfort of which he and Casson had sadly missed. He had replenished his stock of arrows. And there was the tapir meat, which would make a fine meal for them both, roasted on a stout stick held over a blazing fire. Yes, it had been a good day!

The thought of food moved Bomba to still greater speed. He had eaten nothing since morning except a handful of roasted Brazil nuts that Pirah had thrust into his hand at parting, and he was ravenous.

For another hour he pressed rapidly through the jungle, his eyes sharply scanning every tree and covert, for dusk was coming on and the beasts of prey would soon be starting on their nightly mission of death.

Suddenly his steps slackened, for that instinct of his that he had learned to trust warned him of danger. It was in the air. He did not know just what form it was taking, but he knew that, whatever it was, it was near at hand.

As silently now as a panther he glided on, not a twig snapping beneath his sandaled feet.

Soon a smell of a campfire warned him of human proximity. He crept cautiously nearer and, peering through the undergrowth, saw dark forms squatting about a fire. He edged a little

nearer until he could hear fragments of their guttural speech.

Bomba dropped on his stomach and wormed his way through the brush until he reached the outermost edge of the zone of light cast by the fire. Then from his screen he slowly raised his head and looked.

There were thirty or more savages seated in council. One of them he recognized as the man he had met in the forest at the crossing of the trails.

These, then, were the head-hunters, the men who were seeking Casson's death and his own!

CHAPTER XXIII

WORDS OF DOOM

BOMBA'S eyes swept round the circle and rested on the scarred, hideous face of a powerful savage, the symbols on whose chest proclaimed him chief.

He knew it was his arch-enemy, Nascanora!

Bomba drew a long breath and thanked the jungle instinct that had warned him of danger and kept him from blundering right into the hands of the enemy.

Some sort of incantation had evidently been in progress, as was manifest from the presence of a kettle over the fire in which the medicine man had been stirring his horrid brew. The shaman had now desisted, and had reported to the chief the will of his gods.

That it fitted in with the chief's plans was shown by the words that fell from Nascanora's lips.

"Cody Casson," he said. "The gods say he is Man of Evil. He bring trouble to the tribe. He must die."

"Ugh!" came in a concerted grunt of assent

from the men squatted on their haunches about the fire.

Bomba lay motionless, his heart thumping against his ribs. He had come at an opportune moment. He would learn the plans of the enemy.

So they would kill Casson, would they? Well, they would have to kill Bomba first. His lips drew back from his teeth, and his fingers sought his knife.

"We know now where Casson live," the chief went on. "Morana found the place. He tell us wild boy Bomba is away. Casson is alone. We go now. Catch Man of Evil. We bring him here——"

"Ugh!" his followers cried again on a higher note of excitement. "We go. Now!"

"We take Man of Evil," cried Nascanora, the scowl on his distorted features horrible to see. "We tie him to tree. We make fire," he made a gesture as though his hands held flint and steel. "We burn Cody Casson. Then Man of Evil bring not bad things to tribe of Nascanora."

Bomba waited to hear no more.

Swiftly, noiselessly, still flat upon his stomach, he backed out through the heavy underbrush and tangle of vines. He knew that not only his life but that of Casson depended on his getting away without letting Nascanora guess at his presence there.

When he had got far enough away to think it safe for him to rise to his feet, he was startled by a great noise of shouting that swelled into a fiendish shriek.

He thought at first that they must have discovered him, despite his caution, and were in pursuit. But he had been so careful that he dismissed this for another solution.

The shout must mean that the pow-wow was over, and that they were getting ready to start for the hut where Casson waited for Bomba, alone and unprotected.

Setting off with strides like those of a deer, Bomba vowed that he would outrace the Indians. He must get to the hut before them, or Casson was lost.

But the Indians, too, were swift and adept in getting through the jungle. Knowing that they would take the most direct trail, Bomba was forced to choose a more circuitous one.

His chief hope lay in his extraordinary fleetness of foot. If this did not fail him and if he met with no other mishaps in the jungle, he might yet be able to reach the hut and make some preparations for defense before Nascanora and his followers reached it on their errand of destruction.

He made his way with desperate energy and

all the speed he could infuse into his legs, pausing for no obstacle great or small.

In the course he had chosen lay a primitive bridge that had been placed across one of the streams that abounded in the region. The bridge consisted simply of the trunk of a mirity palm, wet and slippery from the recent storm.

If Bomba had followed his usual custom on such occasions and kicked off his sandals, so that his bare feet might get a grip on the log, he could have passed over it in perfect safety, as he had done hundreds of times before.

But so frantic was his haste and so great his belief in his ability to maintain his balance on any footing, however precarious, that this time he did not stop to remove his sandals.

He had traversed almost the entire length of the bridge and had nearly reached the further shore when he slipped and fell, scrambling and kicking, into the water.

It would not have been so bad if in the fall he had not struck his head against the log. This dazed him for a moment, but the shock of the water revived him and brought him to the surface sputtering and furious.

He struck out strongly for the shore, but at the same moment something bit viciously at his leg. Bomba knew at once what it was—the saw-

toothed piranha, the voracious fish that abounds in all the tributaries of the Amazon.

It was fortunate for Bomba that he had been so close to the farther shore when he fell. A few vigorous strokes, and he reached the shore. As he drew himself up, another piranha caught his foot in its vice-like jaws and hung on grimly, even after Bomba had drawn himself clear of the water.

Bomba kicked out viciously, and the fish loosened its hold and dropped back into the water. The boy scarcely took time to examine his wounds, though they were very painful and, he knew, would be still worse on the following day. That was, he thought, with a stab at his heart, if he should ever see the light of the next day!

He was furious with himself. Bomba, to have lost his footing on the bridge, Bomba, who had always prided himself on being so sure-footed! The mishap had delayed him seriously. Perhaps it had sealed Casson's doom and his own.

The journey seemed never-ending as he pressed on, spurring his jaded muscles to the utmost. He was faint from hunger and wearied by the many adventures of that exciting day. His feet felt as if they were weighted with lead. The one that had been bitten by the piranha was already badly swollen, and every step was accompanied by a torturing pang.

And to this physical pain was added the agony of apprehension that with every moment became more acute. Had his enemies preceded him? Had they perhaps already reached the hut?

At last he reached the vicinity of the hut. The crisis was at hand. Perturbed as he was in mind, his jungle cunning did not desert him.

He drifted toward the location of the hut like a shadow. Not a twig snapped under his feet to betray him. He dropped on his hands and knees and crept in this position for a hundred yards to a little elevation from which he would be able to look down directly on the hut. Reaching the spot, he parted the vines and looked through.

It was so dark now that none but jungle-trained eyes could have distinguished anything in the dense pall of blackness. But Bomba had eyes almost as keen as those of Polulu.

Not a sound broke the heavy silence of the night. But for Bomba's eyes, he might have exulted in the thought that he had outstripped the Indians in the race, that he had reached the hut in time to warn Casson.

But there was a shadow near the hut, and at little distances were other shadows completely encircling it—a sinister ring of threatened death.

Bomba's heart beat faster, his breath seemed almost to whistle through his clenched teeth.

The odds were fearful ones—thirty to two at

least, really thirty to one, for Casson could not be relied on in his half-demented state, and whatever fighting was done would probably have to be done by Bomba.

The jungle boy thought quickly. Force alone would not avail. He must use strategy, even as he had used it in the case of the cooanaradi.

But what and how? He racked his agonized brain, seizing at some expedient only to dismiss it the next moment as futile. And every instant he expected to hear the bloodcurdling war whoop of the savages as they rushed the cabin.

Then like a flash it came to him!

With incredible swiftness, still on hands and knees, he made his way to a hollow tree. This had been his playroom since his earliest childhood, and in its trunk Bomba had stored many of his treasures.

Chief among these was the skin of a great anaconda, slain by Casson many years ago. It had had a great fascination for Bomba, and many a time he had arrayed himself in it, dragging its great length behind him. Often he had used it to scare playfully his friends of the jungle.

The monkeys and parrots had fled in dismay, and when Bomba had cast it aside had returned timidly and looked at him reproachfully for having played a practical joke upon them. Polulu had bared his teeth when he first saw it, and had

sheepishly abandoned his hostile attitude when Bomba had emerged and laughed at him.

Now it was to serve for something sterner than play. Bomba's face was grim as he got into the great skin and wrapped the front part of it about his head and shoulders.

The dried head, with the great jaws gaping, had been retained in its entirety, and Bomba held this before his face as he prepared to emerge from his hiding place. The horrible object was one calculated to strike terror to the stoutest heart.

But for the full success of the stratagem light was needed. The Indians must see the fearsome thing in all its ghastliness.

Bomba felt about for one of the pine knots that in earlier days he had used to illuminate his play place. He found one, full of resin, and, concealed by the tree, lighted the torch. In a moment it was blazing brightly.

With a weird, hideous scream that rang through the silent jungle and startled it into a hundred echoes, Bomba left his shelter, flinging the torch ahead of him and dashed down upon that sinister ring of figures about the hut.

The ruse worked. There were shrieks of terror, and the savages gave way before the horrible vision of a snake that ran on two feet and made a noise like the screaming of demons!

The way to the hut was clear. In a few great

bounds Bomba had reached it and catapulted himself through the doorway.

With a hoarse cry Casson grasped a spear that leaned against the wall near at hand and raised it on high.

"No, no, Casson! Do not strike!" gasped the boy, as he let the empty snake skin slip from him to the floor. "It is I, Bomba! Look!"

CHAPTER XXIV

AGAINST FEARFUL ODDS

AN exclamation of amazement and relief fell from the old naturalist as he lowered the spear.

"But why—what—" he stammered, as he lay the weapon aside.

"The Indians!" panted Bomba, as he slammed the door shut and slipped into place the heavy bar he had fashioned while he was rebuilding the hut. "Nascanora and his head-hunters! They are here. You heard their cries. They have come to get you, to burn you in a fire."

A light of comprehension came into Casson's old faded eyes.

"But they shall not," he cried, with a flare of the old courage and energy in which Bomba had formerly taken pride and which he had never expected to see again. "We will fight. I do not much care for myself; but if they kill me, they will kill you, too. And they shall not do it! We will beat them off!"

"Yes," cried Bomba, his eyes kindling. "But they are many. We shall have to fight hard. We will fight with bows and arrows. And when they

are gone, we will fight some more, you with the spear and I with the fire stick. And the machete, too, will be good. Yes, we will fight."

For a time, however, it seemed that it might not be necessary to fight. After the first howls of fright and the frantic scurrying of the Indians before that awful apparition, a deep silence again fell on the jungle.

An hour passed, and still the hush continued.

In the truce thus gained, Bomba and Casson made all the preparations possible for the battle that seemed imminent. The old man, under the stimulus of the danger threatening them, regained something of his old energy and power to think and act.

How long this would continue Bomba did not know. But he was thankful for the change. It gave him a sense of comradeship, a relief from bearing a dead weight, and infused him with new heart and hope. How much Casson would be able to accomplish was of course conjectural, but there was a chance that even his feeble help might turn the scale of battle.

Together they got out their stock of arrows and laid them within easy reach. Bomba fully loaded the revolver and opened all his boxes of cartridges. The boy, in reconstructing the cabin, had made loopholes on all four sides through which the weapons could be discharged.

He took advantage now of the lull, and ate some handfuls of rice and raw maize and drank copious draughts of water. It was but a meager meal, but it refreshed him wonderfully.

Still the silence persisted, and the little garrison felt some perplexity.

"Do you think they may have gone away?" whispered Casson, with a little accent of hope.

Bomba shook his head.

"I do not think so," he answered in the same low tone. "They have come too far. They will not go back without trying to kill us. At first they thought the snake was magic. They were afraid. But Nascanora will talk to them big words and they will come back. We shall have to fight."

The last word had scarcely left Bomba's lips when a terrific chorus of yells rang out and a concerted rush of savages was made on the door of the cabin.

The door bent, but the stout bar of *lignum vitæ*, almost as strong as iron, refused to break.

Bomba leaped to his feet and grasped his bow. He fitted an arrow to the string and took aim through a porthole at the nearest figure.

The bow twanged. The arrow whistled on its way. There was a wild scream from the Indian, who threw up his hands and plunged forward on his face.

Casson had also snatched a bow and essayed to follow Bomba's example. But his sight was defective and his hand tremulous, and the missile failed to find a target.

But one of the Indians had fallen anyway, and although this counted for little when the number of their foes was considered, the moral effect was on the side of the besieged. They had got in the first blow and served notice on the attackers that they would have to pay in lives for whatever they got.

The shadowy figures had disappeared as though by magic, seeking shelter behind the trees that fringed the clearing.

Bomba could hear the sound of axes. His enemies were cutting down a tree. For what purpose?

The question was quickly answered. A dozen savages emerged from the shadows, bearing between them a heavy log ten feet long, with the evident purpose of using it as a battering ram to beat in the door.

Bomba knew that if they succeeded in this, Casson and he were lost. Once let that horde invade the cabin, and nothing could avail against overpowering numbers.

No time for arrows now. He had a far quicker weapon at hand. The white man's fire stick!

They were so near that he could not miss. So swiftly that the repeated detonations blended into one continuous report, he emptied the five chambers of the revolver.

At that close range every shot took its toll in dead and wounded. Several fell, others staggered back to the shelter of the woods. Among the wounded Bomba recognized the towering figure of Nascanora. The log went down with a crash, and the survivors of those who had been carrying it fled in panic.

It was not only the execution done, but the way it had been done that filled them with fright. Few of them had ever before heard the report of a firearm—perhaps none of them. The spurts of flame and the roar of the weapon confirmed their conviction that the hut was the habitation of wizards.

A snake that walked on two feet! Fire that spoke and killed! What chance had they with their bows and arrows, especially when they could not see their targets?

Bomba handed the revolver to Casson to reload, and in the meantime fitted another arrow to his bow. But though he strained his eyes through the darkness, he could find nothing at which to shoot.

For a long time there was silence about the hut, and now for the first time Bomba permitted

himself to hope that their foes had withdrawn, for that night at least, and perhaps permanently. Their losses had been serious. The threat of the battering ram had failed. Perhaps they had had enough of the contest.

But this conjecture had not thoroughly taken into account the resources and ingenuity of Nascanora.

From the woods came something in a trail of flame, and the next moment there was a soft thud in the logs that formed the wall.

Several others followed in quick succession. And now the ground immediately in front of the hut was streaked with flickering shafts of light that momentarily grew brighter.

Casson was mystified.

"What are they doing?" he asked wonderingly.

Bomba had been asking himself that question, too. And now the solution came to him, and his heart sank.

"They are arrows with fire in their tails," he answered. "They are trying to burn the hut."

For a moment despair clutched their hearts. This was something on which they had not counted, something against which they had no way to fight.

Bomba's first impulse was to dash outside the door and tear down the burning arrows. But he realized at once that this would be suicide. In

the light that came from the torches he would offer a perfect target and a dozen arrows would be buried in his body.

Now the two within the hut heard an ominous crackling which told them that the wall was catching fire. It grew louder and louder. It seemed to spell their doom.

They were in a fearful plight. If they stayed inside, they would be burned to death. If they rushed outside, nothing could save them from the arrows of their invisible foes.

Invisible! It was this that made Bomba grind his teeth in rage. He had often faced death, but on those occasions he had seen his foes and had had his chance of selling his life dearly. Now even this poor privilege would be denied him. He and Casson would be shot down with perfect impunity by the enemies behind the trees. Long before he could reach them, he would have fallen.

Other arrows with their fire trails had followed the first flight, and Bomba knew by the increasing light on the ground that the wall must be studded with them.

The crackling now was becoming a roar, and Bomba could tell that the logs themselves were afire. spurts of flame began to creep through the cracks, and the heat became unbearable.

He and Casson tried to beat out the interior

blaze with boards, but for every flame they extinguished a dozen more appeared. The wall had fairly caught, and the fire was beyond their control. The end seemed very near.

Bomba mentally said farewell to life. It was hard to die right on the threshold of life. All his dreams had faded. He would never see the white men again, never solve the mystery of his existence.

Their hands and faces now were blistered by the heat, and they were forced to retreat to the farther part of the hut. There was a little water there, and they dashed it over them. Then they drenched some cloths that they wrapped around their necks and faces.

"Bomba, my boy!" said Casson, in one of his rare expressions of affection. "I'm an old man, and weary. But you're a lad and should live on." The old man went on, but now the words became mere muttering.

Hope now was gone. They could not help themselves and there was none to help them.

None to help them?

Bomba started as though from an electric shock.

He sprang to one of the portholes and sent out a loud, long, undulating cry that rang wierdly through the jungle.

Again and again he repeated the cry with all the power of his lungs.

It was the call that he had used many times to summon his jungle friends to his side, and they had always come!

Would they come now?

Would they face fire?

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE NICK OF TIME

THE jungle beasts came in swarms!

In the distance could be heard something like the sougling of a great wind. It grew in volume until it swelled into a roar. Then the jungle about the hut was alive with monkeys, scores of them, hundreds of them, with every passing moment increasing their numbers.

They saw the burning hut, and sensed Bomba's extremity. They saw the lurking savages, and realized that they were Bomba's foes.

Then there came pouring down from the trees a hail of the heavy castanha nuts that felled whatever they struck.

The surviving savages fled, with wild screams, in a headlong rout. And their demoralization was complete when Polulu, with a tremendous roar, came bounding in upon them, his eyes glaring, his tail lashing, his paws striking out like flails.

Bomba heard the shrieks of the affrighted savages, the jabbering of the monkeys, and the roars

of Polulu. His jungle friends had not failed him. He and Casson were saved!

With smarting eyes he rushed to the door, threw off the heavy bar and swung the door wide.

Then he ran back to Casson, who was in a half comatose condition, pulled him to his feet and, half dragging, half lifting him, staggered through the doorway and laid his burden under the trees.

What blessed coolness was in the night air as Bomba drank it in deep draughts! And what added delight came to him as he felt on his uplifted face the plashing of raindrops!

Casson was now in a state of complete collapse, and Bomba was frightened at the ashen pallor of the old man's face. He rushed to the river behind the cabin and brought water, with which he bathed Casson's face. Then he chafed his wrists and slapped his hands, until the naturalist opened his eyes with a feeble moan.

The monkeys were all excitement, and chattered their sympathy with Casson and their delight at Bomba's escape. They would have come down and surrounded the pair, had it not been for the presence of Polulu, who had returned from his pursuit of the savages and who now came up to Bomba and rubbed his great head against him.

Then the puma stretched himself on the

ground at a little distance, and Bomba knew as well as if he had been told that his faithful guardian was settled there for the night. Woe to any skulking savage who might steal back there while Polulu was on guard!

But, as a matter of fact, there was no further attack to be apprehended that night, nor for many more to come. The Indians had paid heavy toll. Five lay dead on the ground, and probably twice that number in wounded had crawled away into the forest or been carried off by their comrades.

At least half of the raiders had been incapacitated, and among the wounded had been Nascanora himself, and all the unwounded survivors were at that moment rushing pell-mell through the jungle, frantically eager to put as many miles as possible between themselves and the cabin, where the white man's magic had been capped by the calling of the jungle beasts to help.

As soon as Casson had been restored to consciousness and Bomba had bandaged his burns as well as he could, the lad turned his attention to the cabin.

But there was nothing he could do that nature was not doing still better. The rain was now coming down in torrents. It deluged the burning front wall until the blaze died out and great clouds of steam took its place.

Fortunately, the other three walls had caught in only a few places, and here, too, the flames were quickly extinguished.

The monkeys gradually dispersed after Bomba told them how grateful he was for their help and promised to soon see them again.

The storm increased in violence, and Bomba helped Casson into the hut. The roof had held and the floor was dry. Bomba made the old man as comfortable as he could in one of the new hammocks he had brought with him, and then crept into the other to get the rest he so badly needed and had so richly earned.

The last thing he was conscious of, as he dropped off to sleep, was that Polulu had come in and stretched his huge form across the doorway.

Bomba slept late, and when at last he opened his eyes the faithful puma had gone. He had stayed until all danger was over and then gone forth to his hunting.

Bomba himself was stiff and sore, but all concern for himself was quickly lost in his anxiety over Casson's condition. The terrible experience through which he had passed had been too much for the old naturalist, and he was in a high fever. He did not recognize Bomba, and babbled incoherently in delirium. At intervals he would sink into a stupor that would endure for hours,

to be broken again by wild tossings and meaningless phrases.

At times the words "Bartow" and "Laura" would escape his lips, but though Bomba listened eagerly for what would follow, nothing came that made more clear for him the mystery in which he was enshrouded.

The boy nursed Casson assiduously, using the simple but effective remedies whose power he had learned from Candido, the half-witted caboclo, and at the end of several days the fever broke.

From then on Casson mended rapidly, and Bomba was delighted to note that with returning strength his mind seemed less clouded. He had lost some of his apathy, and took a greater interest in the things about him.

The "door" was still closed, but he was trying harder to open it than he had before. At times a flash of memory seemed to come to him, and he would begin to speak eagerly, but before he had fairly framed a sentence the thought would elude him. At such times he was desperate, and would break out into a passion of weeping.

One day he called Bomba to him.

"Bomba," he said, laying his thin hand on the boy's shoulder, "I have tried and tried to tell you what you have a right to know, but I cannot remember. Sometimes I almost recall it, and then it vanishes. But there has come to me a

name. There is someone who knows, and he can tell you much, perhaps all."

"Who is it?" cried Bomba excitedly.

"It is Jojasta," replied Casson. "Mark well that name, Jojasta."

"I will never forget it," said Bomba solemnly. "But what is he and where does he live?"

"He is the Medicine Man of the Moving Mountain," replied Casson.

"The Moving Mountain?" repeated Bomba, in bewilderment. He had never heard the term before."

"It is a long way off," explained Casson. "And it is hard to reach. But I will tell you how to get there. Yes, I know that now. But the other is too far away. That I cannot recall. Through Jojasta is the only way you can find out what you want to know, what you ought to know. You must go."

How Bomba went there, the fearful perils he met, and the obstacles he surmounted on the way, will be told in the next volume of this series, entitled: "Bomba, the Jungle Boy, at the Moving Mountain; or, The Mystery of the Caves of Fire."

Casson sank back exhausted, and Bomba knew there was nothing more to be told just then. But what he had heard filled him with hope.

He must tell his friends and let them share

his joy. He took his harmonica and strayed off into the jungle, playing a dreamy, plaintive tune.

Soon his jungle friends of the air and treetops were all about him, Kiki, Woowoo, Doto, and scores of others. He smiled at them, talked and played for them. He was in a joyous, exhilarated mood, and they were glad for Bomba's sake.

"You are all my friends," he cried. "You helped Bomba when the men with bad hearts came to the cabin. Bomba loves you all. He does not want to leave you, but he must go. He will always think of you, and some day he may come back to you. But Bomba must go. He must find the men who have souls, the souls that are awake. For Bomba has a soul. And he must find the white men. For Bomba is white."

He tore the puma skin aside and displayed his chest.

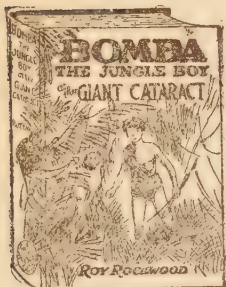
"Look, Woowoo! Look, Kiki! Look, Doto!" he cried, in an ecstasy of joy and pride. "Look, all of you! I will tell Polulu, too. I am white! Bomba is white!"

THE END

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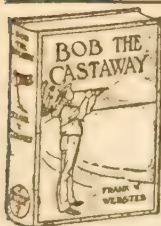
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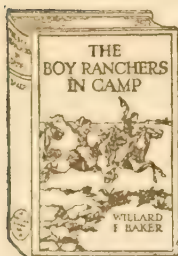
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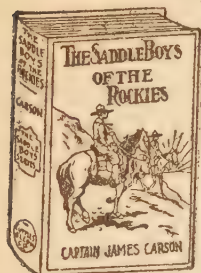
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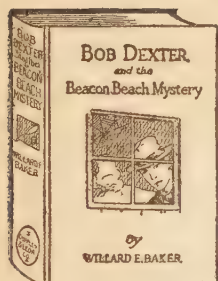
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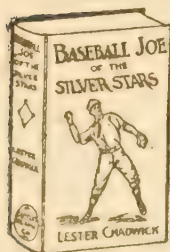
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